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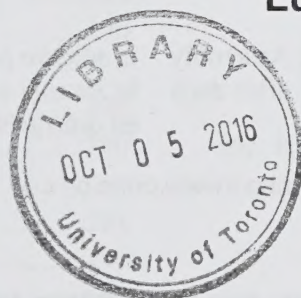
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Monday 26 September 2016

Lundi 26 septembre 2016



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 September 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 septembre 2016

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: They're not here yet, but shortly the students and teachers of Gordon A. Brown Middle School will be joining us for question period.

And I'd like to welcome my great friend, Matthew Fairlie, who is president and CEO of Next Hydrogen and an owner of a hydrogen-powered automobile.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to introduce today to the chamber Mr. Terry May, former deputy fire chief of the Oil Springs Fire Department. He and his fiancée helped save a woman in Petrolia earlier this year. He will receive the 2016 Canada Bravery Award of the Royal Canadian Humane Association this morning from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. Welcome, Terry and family.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome some guests in the gallery today. They are Vladimir and Patricia Spevak from Kingsville, and they're the proud parents of page captain Gideon Spevak. I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park today. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I know joining us today at Queen's Park will be students from Cassandra Public School. The school is found in the beautiful riding of Don Valley East. I would like to welcome them to the Legislature here today.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome some of my constituents who are here visiting Queen's Park: Adam Omarali, his parents, Zenobia and Bill Omarali, and grandmother Phiroso Omarali. I want to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome visitors from the Gateway Worship Centre in Gravenhurst: Phil Tomassetti, Janet Judd, Kim Tingey, Jaimie Smale, Mandy McQuarrie, Angela Chamberland, Lisa Frank, Bob Kitchener, Cindy Kitchener, John Crawley and Marlene Crawley. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'd like to welcome Ms. Chantal Lafond, mother of page captain Jesse Beairisto. Welcome.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm happy to acknowledge one of our pages, Sarah Roposa. Her teacher, Ms. Talarico, and grade 8 students, her classmates from St. Jerome Catholic Elementary School, will be here at one point. I'm not sure if they're in the gallery just yet, Speaker, but I understand they will be soon.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I would like to welcome to the Legislature today Thelma Kountouris and her sons, Nikolas and Gerry. They're here to witness an outstanding day of question period. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I beg forgiveness in advance, Speaker. It's not truly an introduction, but I want to take a very quick moment to wish a happy birthday to our colleague from Barrie, MPP Ann Hoggarth. Happy birthday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

Would the members please join me in welcoming, from the Speaker's gallery, a delegation from the Manitoba Legislature who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: the Speaker, Honourable Myrna Driedger, Clerk Patricia Chaychuk and Deputy Clerk Rick Yarish. Welcome to Ontario.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On September 22, the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, Mr. Hillier, provided a written notice of his intention to raise a point of privilege with respect to Bill 2, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to election matters. I have also reviewed a written submission from the NDP chief government whip, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, Mr. Vanthof, that is broadly supportive of Mr. Hillier's submission. I am now prepared to rule on this matter without hearing further from the member, as the standing order 21(d) permits me to do so.

The member states that the government has indicated that it intends to bring forward certain amendments to the bill when the bill is eventually at that stage in committee. The member alleges that the anticipated amendments are of such a nature and of such significance that he is unable to meaningfully participate in the current debate since the current version of the bill is incomplete as a result. The member therefore says he is unable to fulfill his duties and functions as a member, which is a breach of privilege.

I will note that when this bill was last debated, the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington raised a point of order to challenge the orderliness of Bill 2 on substantially the same grounds as are raised in his point of privilege. After considering the point of order last Thursday, the Deputy Speaker found that Bill 2 was

in order and that the debate on the bill was properly before the House.

I will also note that while the member alleges that he is unable to perform his parliamentary duties to debate Bill 2, in fact he did participate in the debate last Thursday and delivered a nearly one-hour leadoff speech. It is difficult to reconcile the member's plea that he has been prevented from participating in the debate when quite the opposite is the actual case.

I understand the nuance of the member's argument with respect to the fact that certain possible amendments to the bill were not available for him to substantively address during his speech, but that fact did not prevent the member from being able to stand in the House and participate in debate.

Further, the possibility that amendments to a bill will be put forward in a committee exists with any bill; there is nothing about the legislative process on Bill 2 that is different from any other public bill. I will finally say that the member's fear that he will be deprived of meaningful participation on Bill 2 ought to be tempered by the realization that he—and all members—are protected from arbitrarily having amendments sprung on them that are beyond the scope of the bill as it was agreed to in principle at second reading. Admissible amendments must fall within the umbrella of the bill as agreed to, to that point.

For the various reasons I just mentioned, I cannot find that the member has made out a point of a *prima facie* case of privilege.

Therefore, it is time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

In an effort to hide from the hydro crisis in Ontario, the Liberal spin machine has picked up a new favourite word. When I ask about affordability, they respond with reliability. They tout so-called historic investments to assure we have reliable energy.

1040

But in 2015, Ontario had 135 power outages of some kind. That's as many as BC, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Alberta combined. Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal government is responsible for our so-called reliable energy, why can't the minister keep the lights on?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. We are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am receiving indications by the behaviour that we might want to move immediately—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to address that we may have to move immediately to warnings. I will do so at your will.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'd like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. Our government modernized an electricity system that needed to be fixed to ensure Ontarians have the power they need when they need it. And yes, there are unfortunate circumstances where we have power outages right across the province on some days.

What we don't have any more are rolling brownouts and blackouts that actually cost our economy billions of dollars because of a lack of investment in transmission, in infrastructure. That government—it was like they ran Niagara Falls dry. So what we had to do when we took over is that we invested in transmission and we invested in generation. Now we are making sure that we continue to invest and find ways to make this system as affordable as possible not only for businesses but for residents right across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister of Energy: You can tell that the government benches get a little bit sensitive when we talk about their power outages. So let's speak about the specifics. The total duration of these 135 power outages was 16,620 minutes. That's 11 and a half days of power outages.

Let's look next door to put some context into this. In 2015, Quebec had a total of six and a half hours' worth of power outages.

So let's recap to make this very clear for the Minister of Energy. In Quebec: six and a half hours. In Ontario: 11 and a half days of power outages. Mr. Speaker, does that sound like reliable energy in Ontario? Not at all.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm sure there was a question in there, but it gives me an opportunity to talk about the great stuff that we've been doing in this province when it comes to making our energy system as affordable as we can for our residents and our businesses. We took a system that was reliant on dirty coal, something that they continue to talk about right now, and we know they've got a plan to bring that back.

We also want to ensure that by eliminating dirty coal-fired generation—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to move to warnings. I'm glad the member from Simcoe-Grey really was careful with what he said and how he said it.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We're continuing to take action to make sure that every Ontarian has access to affordable, clean, reliable electricity. We don't actually shy away from investments and investing in infrastructure and transmission like they did during their time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister of Energy: The Minister of Energy is refusing to answer my question on why we don't have reliable hydro

in Ontario. So let's keep on looking at Quebec. In 2015, Quebec had three power outages that were a result of either faulty equipment or human error. Ontario had 32 power outages.

In the Premier's own words: "People in Ontario need to be able to count on an electricity system that's clean and reliable." Clearly the people can't count on that in Ontario, and they certainly can't count on the Liberals to do anything to make hydro bills more affordable or power more reliable.

Mr. Speaker, our system is both unaffordable and unreliable. How does the Minister of Energy continue to condone this system that is an absolute failure because of your decisions, because of your government?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Over the last 13 years, we've been working to rebuild and modernize our system, a system that they left in shambles, and we're on our way to rebuilding 80% of that electricity system, which is now clean and reliable. We are ensuring that we have a system that doesn't have a rolling blackout, that doesn't have blackouts that leave our province in disarray, costing billions of dollars to get our economy back up.

The IESO, for example, estimates that significant transmission projects completed since 2003 have increased the transmission capacity by about 10,000 megawatts. Our government is committed to ensuring that Ontarians have the power they need when they need it and as affordable as we can make it.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Acting Premier. Dr. David Jacobs wrote to me this week. He let me know that in Thunder Bay, they lost three radiologists; two retired and one left Ontario. Thunder Bay lost its only vascular surgeon. As this government vilifies doctors and cuts health care, an exodus is happening.

Northern Ontario can't afford more cuts to their health care and they can't afford to lose more doctors. Northern Ontario certainly deserves more than a whistle stop from the Premier once a year. When can the north expect proper funding in health care? When can they expect the Minister of Health to actually make sure there's physicians in northern Ontario, not chase them out of our province?

Hon. Charles Sousa: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The Leader of the Opposition knows that we continue to increase our funding to physicians in the health care system and in our hospitals throughout the province, including in the north.

But what I think is also really important to address is the recent change of heart that the official opposition has had—and the leader himself—when it comes to binding arbitration for our doctors, because as we know, as recently as August 9, the Progressive Conservative leader had said that his party supports the push for binding arbitration, saying doctors are essential workers like police and firefighters, whose contracts go to third-party

arbitrators. In fact, there is evidence here, perhaps, of a flip-flop, and I'm happy to address it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Interjections: Flip-flop, flip-flop.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. If that continues, I'll find the individuals who start it and provide you with a warning.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Acting Premier. It's one thing to not want to talk about the doctors leaving Thunder Bay; it's another thing to simply read Liberal speaking points that have nothing to do with the question. So I'm going to try again. Dr. Nadia Alam's advocacy has been well noted across the medical community in Ontario.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is warned. Stop the clock. You realize, for information purposes, that when I warn you, the next is "out."

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: According to Dr. Nadia Alam, wait-lists are now the norm in Ontario. She no longer remembers the time when they didn't exist. Three months for an elective MRI, one year for an ophthalmologist, four years for a spine surgeon, six years for a crisis mental health appointment, 28 days for a cancer diagnosis—the list goes on, as do the wait-lists.

My question is: Will the government condone these wait-lists? Do you not appreciate that your cuts to health care have had an enormous cost in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm not surprised that he's quoting Nadia Alam of Concerned Ontario Doctors, because we know that what the Globe and Mail has described as Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown's "closest political confidante," Walied Soliman, was working closely and has been working closely with Concerned Ontario Doctors in the back rooms, along with Dan Robertson, the communications expert and former senior staffer in his office, as well.

But I want to get back to what's really important for Ontarians. We know what the flip was—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Both sides are bantering back and forth.

1050

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We know that on August 9, when the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Sun quoted him in support of binding arbitration, I have no doubt that this is what he told Concerned Ontario Doctors and other doctors behind closed doors.

But more recently—in fact, on September 14—as quoted by Canadian Press, he has quite a different response. I'm sorry; I'm going to have to keep people waiting for what is going to be the final supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, once again, when the health minister can't answer the question he talks

about something that is not related. It is Liberal talking points on how to deal with issues.

So I'm going to try a third time to ask the health minister a question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The President of the Treasury Board is warned.

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the health minister if he'll apologize to our province's physicians. He claimed that their overhead was part of their salaries and he tried to shame them. The health minister is a doctor; he should know better.

He should understand what Dr. Alam said, and that was, "The medical profession exists to serve patients. To do this, we need clinics, secretaries, office managers, nurses and technicians; we need medical-grade equipment and computers, desks and chairs. We buy it and pay for its upkeep and eventual replacement." All of that is paid for by the physicians themselves.

Mr. Speaker, will this government do the right thing? Will they apologize to physicians for the Minister of Health's attempt to disparage—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition should apologize to doctors across this province for telling them that his party would be supporting binding arbitration. On September 9, the Canadian Press quotes him as saying, with reference to binding arbitration: "That should be one of the items on the negotiations table. It should be part of that negotiating process." It's a flip-flop. He has actually publicly endorsed our position, which runs contrary to what his friends in Concerned Ontario Doctors want, which is binding arbitration prior to negotiations. Thank you for endorsing our government's position.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Friday, we learned that the Premier, for the moment, has stopped the plan to privatize OLG. Has the government finally realized that Ontarians did not vote for privatization?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. did its due diligence, in consultation with experienced proponents. OLG had a procurement process for the lottery programs. They have now sought to go forward with in-house programs, recognizing that with the project that was being proposed, the proponents weren't willing to proceed. So we proceeded ourselves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Ontarians didn't vote for privatization, but that hasn't stopped the government from privatizing Hydro One. People are hopeful now that with

the government's intention to, perhaps, stop the privatization of OLG, they might actually stop the sale of Hydro One. Will the Acting Premier listen, for once, to the people of Ontario and actually stop the sell-off of Hydro One, or will the government continue to disappoint the people of this province?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the province and the government looks at its assets and tries to maximize their value in a way that benefits all Ontarians. The process by which the OLG was proceeding recognized that there was more value to the province to have it in-house because of the way it functions.

The people in the Soo, who are doing tremendous work around the gaming operations and the lottery, deserve to have it continue that way, and recognize that they can do it better than a proponent that was providing it outside. There were values and costs involved.

When it comes to Hydro One, the value of Hydro One now is even more than it was before. That's a direct benefit to the people of Ontario and more reinvestment into new projects to provide even greater investment returns.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, privatizing OLG is a bad idea. The people of this province did not vote for it.

Privatizing Hydro One is an even worse idea. The people didn't vote for it, but they don't have a choice: They have to turn on the lights, and they don't want their public system privatized.

If the government is willing to listen to the people of this province and stop the privatization of OLG, why won't they listen to Ontarians and stop the privatization of Hydro One?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite has his facts wrong. Ontario Lottery and Gaming's modernization process is about providing service delivery. It's not about privatizing the OLG; he's completely wrong on that point. Furthermore, we are talking about broadening ownership of Hydro One for the benefit of the people of Ontario, recognizing the returns that we can make. Again, the member opposite has a wrong view.

Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? They have no plan. They have never had a plan. All they put in their proposal was only nine pages, none of which relate to how we're going to invest in our economy, how we're going to stimulate growth and how we're going to make the people of Ontario that much better off. We're doing that here on this side of the House.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is again to the Acting Premier. Liberal insiders say that the Premier is not only interested in selling off Hydro One, but she's also interested in helping the sale of Toronto Hydro. Is that true?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member just referenced something that's important. It is a fact that the

distribution of electricity in our province is actually a competitive process with 72 different companies. Hydro One is only one of a major number that are providing distribution of electricity to the people of Ontario.

He just referenced the fact that, possibly, others are now looking at the benefits of what we're doing in the province relating to Hydro One, and how they can then maximize their use as well in their respective regions.

We also have the consolidation of Horizon, Ener-source, PowerStream and Brampton hydro, a rival to the industry to find and foster greater savings so that people can have greater benefit from that distribution. We will see what happens next.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: People want to make a good life for themselves, but it becomes difficult when they see their bills increasing day after day—bills like Hydro One.

People can't afford the privatization of Hydro One, but the Premier is doing it anyway. But what makes it worse is the reason behind it, the rationale behind it. Liberal insiders are saying that the Premier wants to help the privatization of Toronto Hydro "because it would give her Liberals political cover for their own privatization of Hydro One."

Let that sink in for a minute. For the Liberal Party, it's not about the people, it's about their own self-interests; it's about their own Liberal Party's interest.

Will the government, yes or no, be a part of the sale of Toronto Hydro? Simple question.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I think he's just making it up as he goes.

Obviously, we have made a very clear plan. We've illustrated what we are doing with our assets. We're trying to maximize the value so that we can reinvest into our economy, while safeguarding those very precious assets that are part of the province's ongoing activity. When he relates to other regions and other governments and their desire to look at those ways, it's clearly up to those provinces, those governments and those respective cities.

Again, the member opposite—I have not seen a plan. All we're doing is reinvesting into our economy. We're actually doing what we can to lower the overall costs by removing the 8% HST portion to our bills. The members opposite seemed to want to do that before, and now they're opposing it. We frankly don't know where they're at. We're going to continue doing what's best for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Premier didn't run on privatizing Hydro One, but that's what she's doing anyway. She didn't run on privatizing or helping the sale of Toronto Hydro, but according to Liberal insiders, she thinks it's a good idea. She didn't run on privatizing EnWin, Veridian, Horizon, London Hydro or any other local distribution company, but if the government is willing and supportive of the sell-off of Toronto Hydro, who knows what could be next?

How much more of our public hydro system is this Liberal government planning to privatize?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The Premier of this province ran on promoting a stronger economy; creating more jobs; ensuring that we make everyday life easier by eliminating tuition costs to students, which they voted against; ensuring that we invest more into health care, which they voted against; and ensuring that we actually index a minimum wage, again, something that they seemed to like, but voted against.

We'll continue what we're doing, like increasing child care spaces and ensuring that we invest the monies that are precious to the people of Ontario to make even more for the benefit of the people of Ontario. The member opposite doesn't seem to want to do that. We will do that here.

DRIVER LICENCES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last week, I spoke to the minister and wrote him a letter about one of my constituents, Marie-Julie Cosenzo. She is a paramedic in Gatineau. She lives in Ottawa. She is a first responder, and she has post-traumatic stress disorder after attending a teenage suicide.

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The reason her licence was revoked is cited as "psychiatric disorders," yet Ms. Cosenzo's psychiatrist told Ministry of Transportation officials that there's no "psychological reason why her ability to drive a personal vehicle should be limited." She further states, "In fact, limiting her mobility ... is likely to exacerbate her mental health symptoms."

Through you, Speaker: The minister and all members must be concerned about how this looks, stigmatizing people further who have mental health concerns. I ask the minister: Will the government work to end the stigma surrounding mental health issues and reinstate my constituent's licence as her doctor suggests?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member for the question and also for reaching out to me a number of days ago on this matter relating to her constituent.

As I've said, since receiving that letter, the ministry is taking a look at it. I'm not in a position to comment on any specific case with respect to this procedure. I should point out—obviously I will have a follow-up opportunity in the supplementary—that from the Ministry of Transportation's perspective, there is no blanket decision that gets made with respect to the medical review of licences. Everything is done on a case-by-case basis. I would also point out that, at all times, which I think that member, her constituents and every member in this House can appreciate, the ministry keeps the safety of all users on our roads in terms of its paramount concern. I'd be happy to provide more information in the follow-up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: To the Acting Premier: Earlier this year, while surrounded by Ontario's first responders, the Minister of Labour made a plea for those suffering from PTSD to step forward and seek treatment. Sadly, there are many first responders who will see the negative impact of this case and the loss of independence it has caused. Many will feel as though they must choose between suffering in silence and suffering the consequences of seeking help. Ministers have insisted we must reduce the stigma associated with PTSD and encourage people to get help, yet the actions of their ministries have added to that stigma. Our first responders deserve better and your ministries must do better.

Speaker, to the Acting Premier: What immediate steps will this government take to address the systemic discrimination against PTSD sufferers?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I would say right off the top that I know that every single member of this Legislature from all three parties has enormous respect for the work that our first responders here in the province of Ontario do, day in and day out, to make sure that we are provided with the service that's needed at all times.

I will speak from the perspective of the Ministry of Transportation. As I said just a moment ago in response to the first question, there is no blanket approach that the ministry takes with respect to dealing with the medical review of drivers' licences. At all times, we need to make sure that we have safe roads and highways. I believe every member in the House can appreciate that.

We will continue to work with all of the individuals who have drivers' licences in the province to make sure that if there is a concern raised by a medical professional, we can help them work through the system. It is a system specifically with respect to the medical review of licences. It's constantly updated.

I would only point out quickly, Speaker, that we are currently meeting or exceeding at the ministry our 30-day customer service standard, which is processing more than 90% of cases within 10 days.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Three months before the Nipigon River Bridge failed, inspectors discovered a problem with the bearing assembly. This is the part that holds the bridge to the foundation. This is the part that failed. The contractors proposed a solution. The engineers told the ministry there was still a problem, but the ministry approved it anyway and then didn't install the parts. Why did the MTO roll the dice with people's lives and allow the bridge to open when they knew there were still problems with this bearing assembly?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member opposite for the question. Just last week—I believe it was Thursday—I was in Nipigon with the member, the MPP for that community, my colleague, and as I had said throughout the process with respect to the Nipigon River Bridge, when all of the reports had been

completed with respect to the analysis regarding why the bridge malfunctioned, we would make a public statement and provide a public update to the community and to the people of Ontario. All of the reports relating to the malfunctioning are now available on the Ministry of Transportation's website.

As I said on Thursday, at all times, from my perspective, the safety of the travelling public is the number one priority. That's why we wanted to make sure that we had both lanes of the bridge—on January 10, when it initially malfunctioned, we wanted both lanes of traffic opened again as safely as possible. The ministry was able to complete that task within 24 hours of the malfunction, and we look forward to continuing to provide additional updates on the permanent retrofit or repair as we go forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the minister: We are extremely lucky that no one was injured or killed when the Nipigon bridge suddenly failed within one week of opening. The public deserves to know what went wrong and who is responsible.

MTO officials knew there was a problem with the bridge three months before it opened. They then approved a flawed, quick-and-dry fix that probably would not have prevented the bridge's failure, even if it had actually been installed.

Did the minister know about these problems with the bridge? And if so, why did he allow the bridge to open without making absolutely sure that the bearing assembly would hold?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm not going to comment with respect to some of the implied allegations that are contained in the follow-up question from that member.

I will say, as I said in my original answer, that the safety of the travelling public is the number one priority for the Ministry of Transportation. This member will know that this was a significant investment in crucial infrastructure in northern Ontario, something that I would like to believe that his constituents would appreciate.

We know that we were able to get both lanes of traffic reopened in a safe fashion within 24 hours of the malfunctioning of the bridge. We now have all of the reports, including one conducted by a completely independent external engineering firm. We understand what took place. We are working towards a permanent retrofit.

I should also point out that we also announced last week that we are launching an environmental assessment for an emergency detour route or a redundancy built into that particular part of the Trans-Canada network.

Once again, I'd like to thank the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North for his—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the minister responsible for the Anti-Racism Directorate. A very

necessary dialogue has long been going on in the province, the outcome of which will have a tremendous impact on how we move forward as a society. That dialogue is about racism. As Ontarians, we know that we've made a great deal of progress on diversity and inclusion, but we still have a lot to do before we're at a point where racialized groups are able to reach their full potential.

I understand that the minister recently received his first mandate letter as part of his responsibility for anti-racism. Could the minister please tell us how he intends to take action to combat racism in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener Centre for her question. We started the Anti-Racism Directorate earlier this year because we know exactly what the member just mentioned to be true: that Ontario is an incredible place, and it's full of diversity and inclusion, but we know that we can do better here.

My mandate is very clear: I'm going to lead a cross-government approach to anti-racism, engaging with anti-racism leaders and developing an indigenous-focused anti-racism strategy. I'm going to ensure that the directorate provides leadership and expertise, which includes looking at implementation of this aggregated data in my own ministry and others, and working with my fellow ministers on street checks and police oversight. We're going to find ways to increase public awareness around education—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you to the minister for his answer. It's very encouraging to hear that we are furthering this conversation across our province and working together as Ontarians to move forward.

In July, the directorate held the first of its community meetings in Toronto as part of its efforts to hear from people. That first public meeting focused on anti-black racism. There was a great deal of passionate and honest input at that meeting, but, as I'm sure the minister knows, racism is not restricted to any one corner of the province, and people across Ontario will have valuable insights to offer on all forms of racism.

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I've been in contact for several months with staff at the directorate, urging them to visit Kitchener Centre, where my local stakeholders have experiences to share. Can the minister tell us if he intends to visit my community to engage with people there?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, I'd like to thank the member for her advocacy on this issue.

Absolutely: We intend to bring public meetings across the province. We've announced dates in Hamilton, and we'll be there tonight. Tomorrow night we're in Mississauga, and we'll be in Scarborough in October, then London, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Windsor and Ottawa.

I want everyone to know that we'll be talking about racism, but more specifically Islamophobia. We'll be

talking about anti-black racism. We'll talk about indigenous issues.

I'd like to again thank the member for her advocacy. We've had conversations, and I appreciate the fact that you're willing to hold a conversation in your community to bring value into this larger conversation.

I'd like to invite all members of this House to join us in this journey, because racism is a difficult thing to discuss and talk about, but we know we can make Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. My question pertains to the wpd Canada-proposed 500-foot wind turbine project next to the Collingwood airport.

It's come to my attention that during the recent Environmental Review Tribunal hearing, at the last moment, the province decided to call a Nav Canada representative as an expert witness instead of a representative from Transport Canada. Every pilot and airport official will tell you that calling a witness from Transport Canada would have made much more sense since it's the most knowledgeable and responsible agency tasked with ensuring aviation safety.

Mr. Speaker, we have reason to believe that the change in witnesses was because Transport Canada did have concerns about the location of the 500-foot turbines and had a representative willing to testify. Can the minister please explain why there was a change of witnesses?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the member opposite would know, having been a former Minister of the Environment—maybe he inserted himself into the environmental tribunal process. Maybe he as a minister decided to break the law and direct officials on who should be a witness. Mr. Speaker, I read the law. I will not play a role in determining witnesses or in any way influencing an environmental tribunal, and I will keep it as a non-political process and let the experts choose the witnesses.

I wish the member opposite would not be politicizing it in the way he's trying to, because neither he nor I should be involved in this process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Minister, you can spin this all you want, but my people believe, and we have reason to believe—good reason to believe—that somebody in your ministry tampered with the witnesses.

Speaker, I've said on several occasions in this House that all eight 500-foot wind turbines between the Collingwood Regional Airport and the Stayner aerodrome pose a hazard to aircraft operations. However, each time I make this claim, the government refuses to acknowledge it.

But just a few days ago, the minister's own director admitted in his August 2016 final submission to the Environmental Review Tribunal hearing that two of these

turbines, in two of the locations, pose a serious risk and can no longer be supported as approved by the ministry.

The ministry is rescinding its position on two turbines. Why aren't you looking at the danger posed by all eight turbines?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

I'm going to caution all sides. Some of the verbiage I've been hearing is tightrope-walking between impugning motive and making accusations of an individual. I will be listening and will continue to listen carefully. I haven't actually heard it, but in some of the heckles it came close. Let's guard ourselves against the kinds of things we don't want to race to the bottom for.

Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start off here: A race to the bottom would involve—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: A race to the bottom would involve politicians directing public officials. There is a firewall between me and them; I cannot be involved in conversations with them about these matters. A race to the bottom would be to dismantle the autonomy, independence and expert role that the Environmental Review Tribunal plays.

I had nothing to do with the decision to change the configuration of turbines; experts did that. I had no role, nor did any politician on this side or any other influencer, in who witnesses are. I have protected the process from the member opposite, who wants to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Acting Premier. We are at a critical moment for housing in Toronto. This weekend, the mayor of Toronto said that the provincial government has done “the tiniest little kernel” on social housing. He goes on to say, “If you look at the numbers, it's minuscule compared to what needs to happen.”

People live with the impact of the Liberals' inaction each and every day. Apartments are crumbling, and the wait-list for affordable housing has 170,000 families waiting in line. When will this government step up and make a substantial new investment in social housing, for the benefit of families today and for the next generation?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Housing.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. The province of Ontario and the city of Toronto have a shared priority in ensuring that every person has an affordable and suitable home. Our governments have a strong partnership, and we continue

to build as we work together to improve housing for those in Toronto and those right across Ontario.

We worked closely with the city on the update to our Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. It is a transformative plan that will increase the supply of affordable housing not only in Toronto, but across Ontario. We're making the goal of social housing systems easier to navigate and help achieve. Our goal is to end chronic homelessness.

Since 2013, this government has put \$4 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Back to the Acting Premier: 170,000 families. Social housing in Toronto urgently needs \$2.6 billion in repairs, but this Liberal government is failing to step up and fund the province's share. Without immediate action, hundreds of units will close. We'll lose them. The wait-list will keep growing, and more and more in this city will not be able to afford a roof over their heads.

That's no way to build a better future for families in Toronto. When will this government take real action to help people in the city and fully fund the province's share of repairs to social housing?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you for the opportunity for the follow-up. I ended off the first question by saying that since 2003, the province has made commitments to housing of some \$4 billion, and \$1.2 billion of that alone has been provided to Toronto.

Some of the other key investments I'd love to highlight in the rest of my time here:

—a new portable housing benefit pilot for survivors of domestic violence, with \$3.9 million into that pilot;

—our Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, with \$111.5 million in each of the past three years;

—the Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program, with funding of \$20.6 million, which has assisted over 2,000 households in 2015; and

—investments in affordable housing programs of \$108.3 million for the period from 2011-15.

Clearly, housing is a priority for this province and we will continue to work on that.

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AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M. Yvan Baker: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Madame la Ministre, je sais que vous êtes allée au 27^e congrès de l'Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario la semaine dernière. L'AFMO est une organisation francophone très importante qui offre un forum aux élus et aux employés municipaux.

Je suis très fier d'avoir dans ma circonscription d'Etobicoke-Centre une communauté francophone, et les questions francophones sont vraiment importantes pour moi et pour les gens de ma circonscription. Madame la Ministre, pouvez-vous nous mettre à jour sur vos efforts à l'AFMO?

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Premièrement, j'aimerais remercier le député d'Etobicoke-Centre pour l'excellente question, mais principalement pour son appui aux francophones en Ontario et dans sa communauté. La communauté francophone joue un rôle essentiel dans le développement de l'Ontario. C'est pour cette raison que je me déplace dans des congrès comme l'AFMO pour mieux comprendre la réalité des Franco-Ontariens à travers la province et voir comment nous pouvons les aider à prospérer.

Je leur ai affirmé que notre gouvernement comprend l'importance de la qualité et de l'accessibilité des services gouvernementaux en français. Je vous dirais, monsieur le Président, que c'est une priorité pour nous et nous continuerons d'y travailler.

Je leur ai parlé de certains accomplissements. L'an dernier, la désignation de la ville de Markham a été approuvée, devenant ainsi la 26^e région de la province à être désignée dans la Loi sur les services en français de l'Ontario. Je suis fière de cet accomplissement, tout particulièrement cette année parce qu'on célèbre le 30^e anniversaire de la loi. Et, en novembre prochain, on va recevoir une réponse au Sommet de la Francophonie concernant notre demande d'adhésion.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Question?

M. Yvan Baker: Merci, madame la Ministre. Je vous remercie pour votre dévouement et votre engagement à la communauté franco-ontarienne et à la langue française. Je félicite la ministre pour sa représentation de notre gouvernement au congrès de l'Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario.

Il y a six ans que notre gouvernement a déclaré le 25 septembre le Jour des Franco-Ontariens et des Franco-Ontariennes. Cette journée permet de reconnaître et souligner la contribution exceptionnelle de la communauté francophone à la vie historique, sociale, culturelle, politique et économique de la province. Il y a beaucoup à célébrer dans la communauté francophone ontarienne. Comment est-ce que la ministre continue à appuyer les francophones en Ontario?

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci—

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Merci encore une fois au député—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): May I respond, please?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. La ministre.

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Merci, monsieur le Président, et merci au député. J'espère que tout le monde a eu la chance de célébrer ce dimanche le 25 septembre. C'était un plaisir pour moi de voir la Tour de la Paix illuminée aux couleurs du drapeau franco-ontarien à Ottawa.

De plus, vendredi dernier, le ministre québécois responsable de la Francophonie canadienne, Jean-Marc Fournier, et moi avons profité de la levée du drapeau à Queen's Park pour annoncer un nouveau programme pour les jeunes Franco-Ontariens et Québécois. Nous

avons mis sur pied un projet pilote d'échanges culturels entre 40 jeunes francophones et francophiles du Québec et de l'Ontario. Ce programme va renforcer les liens culturels et linguistiques d'une nouvelle génération des Franco-Ontariens et Québécois. J'aimerais remercier la ministre Hunter pour son appui et son dévouement.

Aussi, monsieur le Président, avec ma collègue la ministre Matthews, on a eu le plaisir d'annoncer la création d'un conseil de planification pour développer l'espace postsecondaire en français. Nous sommes très heureuses que la D^{re} Dyane Adam ait accepté la présidence de—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Acting Premier. Your government promised to protect the social programs Ontarians need and deserve. But evidence is mounting that your policies are hurting Ontario's two million people with disabilities by pushing them into unemployment and poverty. You are forcing the door shut in Durham region's award-winning employment hub. For almost 25 years, the Durham Region Employment Network focused on job creation for people with disabilities. Sadly, 13 years of waste and mismanagement has taken away funding for essential services and so you're cutting employment assistance for people with disabilities.

My question for the Acting Premier is, how is it you could find \$70 million for the defunct ORPP pension plan, \$6 million for Pan Am executives and \$4 million for Hydro One's CEO but you won't put a single dollar into this successful employment office in Durham region for people with disabilities?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister for accessibility.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I am grateful for the question from the member opposite. I believe this is my first question as Ontario's new minister for accessibility in Ontario.

I'm glad he's raised the question about DREN, Durham Region Employment Network. It's a fine organization that provides excellent service to the community. I was sad to hear last week about them potentially closing in October. In fact, I was at a community meeting just late last week and was talking to board members from DREN.

I'm very pleased that my colleague ministries are looking at DREN's recent proposal to see where they may not have met criteria and to give them that feedback, and I'm hopeful that good news will come out of that. In the meantime, I just want to say thank you to the DREN board of directors for their excellent work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back to the Acting Premier: The Durham Region Employment Network was recognized by former Lieutenant Governor David Onley for accessible employment, a critical employment aid to people

with disabilities. But the government is closing it on October 21, Speaker, and those people will have nowhere to turn for the support and training they need and deserve.

This government spent over \$1 billion on gas plants. Yet now, they're leaving people with disabilities in Durham region without access to important employment services. Governing is about priorities and it's clear this government has lost its moral compass.

Will the Acting Premier commit to providing the funding necessary for the Durham Region Employment Network to continue to operate so that people with disabilities in Durham region can access the assistance they need to lead more productive and dignified lives?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Whitby–Oshawa for the question. Let me just say that it is important to remember our government is very committed to breaking down barriers for persons with disabilities here in our province. Increasing employment of persons with disabilities in Ontario is a huge, huge priority for us. In fact, if you look at my mandate letter, Speaker, I am charged with leading the cross-government work on an employment strategy for persons with disabilities.

I'm very pleased that the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development has reached out to DREN to talk about their proposal and to see where we can go from there. Meanwhile, we're very committed to working with all the agencies that support persons with disabilities in Durham region and throughout the province and making sure all people with disabilities can reach their full potential.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Speaker, there is a disaster happening for so many families who are losing their loved ones to fentanyl and opioid overdoses. While Ontario tracks some emergency department admissions for opioid overdoses, it's been revealed that this government has no real-time monitoring of overdose deaths. That means that physicians and public health officials are struggling to manage this disaster in the dark, with data that is two and sometimes three years old. This government needs to do so much more to stop this crisis.

My question: Why is this government still not doing real-time monitoring of overdose deaths across our province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Clearly, this government is committed to addressing this important issue of opioid abuse and we've already taken important steps, in fact, this year, making naloxone—which is a lifesaver antidote—available free of charge at pharmacies without a prescription, and other important measures.

When it comes to real-time data, it's critically important we have that information. At more than 100 hospitals around the province, we automatically receive,

in real time, information based on triage of overdoses that take place. That information is available to the ministry. It's available to public health officials as well.

Is there more work that we can do? Of course there is. We're working with the coroner's office as well. I actually hope in the coming days and weeks to be able to speak more about this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Right now, the way we have it, we have the worst of both worlds. Families are losing their loved ones to these powerful drugs every day and people are losing their access to these drugs to control their pain. We need immediate action from this government to stop this disaster. It shouldn't take until 2017 to determine how many people died of overdoses in 2015. We need to understand how big the problem is right now. How big is it currently? Time is of the essence, Speaker. People are suffering and people are dying.

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My question is simple: Will this government commit today to real-time monitoring of all overdose deaths throughout our province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I appreciate the question. I know that the member opposite appreciates that the coroner is the individual who receives this information when there's a possible death due to an opioid overdose. There is the requirement that a death investigation take place by the coroner's office as well. This does take some time to accomplish, but we're working with his office. We're also looking at other measures we can take so that we can get as much accurate data as soon as humanly possible. We need to do it in a responsible way.

But I want to emphasize that that's only one part of the solution. I appointed a task force earlier this year to look at how we can further provide supportive measures. We need to focus as well on appropriate prescribing and education of our health care professionals, providing support to those who do find themselves addicted to opiates. We're working hard on all of these measures, Mr. Speaker, and I expect in the coming days I'll have more to speak to.

RABIES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Mr. Speaker, through you, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Minister, there's been a lot of mention in the news lately about rabies in regions of southern Ontario. My understanding is that these 196 animals have been infected with a particular strain of rabies that hasn't been seen in Ontario since 2005. I know my constituents might have questions about how the re-emergence of this disease happened and what steps Ontario is taking to make sure the strain does not spread any further.

Can the minister share how her ministry and its partners are working to control this outbreak to ensure public awareness of raccoon rabies?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: I wish to thank the hard-working member of Northumberland–Quinte West for the question.

This government is very committed to protecting the public, their pets and their livestock from rabies. I want to acknowledge the efforts of the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care and of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in helping to inform the public and aiding our investigations.

To address this outbreak, my ministry regularly distributes baits containing an oral vaccine along the border with the United States in order to prevent infected animals from coming here. This re-emergence is likely due to an infected animal making its way in on a commercial truck, where it sought food and warmth. Upon discovering the first rabid raccoon in Ontario, we elevated those efforts by quickly distributing more than one and a half million vaccines over a large area.

We've also collected almost 4,000 surveillance samples that indicate the outbreak has been contained within 45 kilometres of the initial case.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you to the minister for her answer. It is good to know that your ministry is responding to this outbreak. I know that last time there was an outbreak of this nature, the tools were very limited, leading to the culling of many raccoons as a preventive measure.

It is also reassuring that we now have tools like this vaccine that can be more broadly and more humanely used to control the spread of the disease. I understand that this product has even been exported to peer jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S.

Can the minister elaborate on this vaccine further and perhaps share with this House her plans for further addressing this problem in the future?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: I want to again thank the hard-working member for Northumberland–Quinte West for the opportunity to elaborate on Ontario's response to this challenge.

This vaccine, which is called ONRAB, is a made-in-Ontario solution developed by my ministry and a private industry in Ontario. It can vaccinate a high proportion of the foxes, raccoons and skunks that eat it.

As mentioned, baiting is of limited effectiveness during the colder months, but when animals emerge from their dens in the spring, we'll begin a massive baiting program, perhaps upwards of one million such baits, depending on what our winter surveillance tells us about the outbreak. Not only is this more humane than culling strategies; it's cheaper and much more effective.

I want to stress that it may take two or more years to ensure we've turned the tide on the outbreak, but I'm confident in the response of our partners in the health, municipal, landowners and trapping communities to manage the challenge.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

On page 11 of the September 22 edition of the Standard Guide Advocate newspaper, there was an article which stated that the local OPP detachment will close on December 31 of this year. This was the first time that my office and members of the public had heard about this significant closure. The people of Forest and throughout Lambton Shores have great respect for the local OPP, and I can tell you that a closure of this significance is one that should have been widely announced and considered by the local community.

Can the minister inform me of the usual practices of public consultation and review when small-town and rural OPP detachments are to be closed, or is a mention on page 11 of the local newspaper the normal way of proceeding for this Liberal government?

Hon. David Orazietti: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

As the member knows, OPP operational matters are a discussion that takes place internally to the OPP so that they can best protect Ontarians. I want to first and foremost commend the OPP and our officers in the OPP for the work that they do across the province in keeping Ontarians safe.

I understand the member's concern with respect to these offices and operational issues. These occur from time to time to ensure that the OPP are best positioned to respond to concerns across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Well, Minister, I can tell you that whatever protocol you have, it wasn't followed this time around.

Back to the minister: My understanding from reading page 11 of the Standard Guide Advocate newspaper is that the officers will be transferred to the Petrolia detachment some 35 kilometres away. With no public consultation or community buy-in, residents are rightly concerned that the level of police services in Forest and throughout Lambton county is going to suffer with this rushed change.

Can the minister assure my constituents that police services and public safety will not be adversely affected by your closing of the Forest OPP detachment?

Hon. David Orazietti: I can say unequivocally that any decision that is made by the OPP with respect to operational matters is to ensure the highest level of safety for all Ontarians. These types of decisions are operational matters of the OPP. They make those decisions periodically to ensure the best response time, the best and highest standards of protection for Ontarians.

I'm happy to discuss this with the member opposite after and look into the matter, but what I can tell you today is that the OPP makes a decision around operational matters to ensure the highest protection for residents across the province.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier. An alarming report from the Ontario University

and College Health Association confirms that there is a mental health crisis in Ontario post-secondary institutions. The president of the association says that lives are at stake.

In my own community of London, the new 24-hour mental health crisis centre has been overwhelmed by college and university students since it opened its doors in January this year.

It's clear we are at a critical moment. The time for a coordinated provincial strategy—not just projects—is long overdue. Will the Acting Premier commit to moving forward immediately with a province-wide strategy for mental health services on Ontario campuses?

Hon. Charles Sousa: To the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member for her advocacy on behalf of our students.

As a former academic myself, I have seen first-hand the amount of pressure students in our universities and colleges face due to various sources. They have to meet exams, they have to pass courses, they are concerned about graduation and finding jobs after graduation, and forming their own families. There's so much pressure, including pressure on the financial matters: how they are going to pay for tuition fees, their expenses etc.

That's why our government has introduced, for example, the Ontario Student Grant: in order to help students from low-income families to continue their education for free in our universities and colleges, to release a little bit of that mental pressure from our students at our campuses.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The results of the 2016 student survey show a significant increase from 2013, when the Liberals first started funding mental health projects on campus: 65% of students experienced overwhelming anxiety in the previous year, 46% were so depressed in the previous year that it was difficult to function, 13% had seriously considered suicide in the previous year and 9% had attempted suicide. I have been asking this government, and students have been asking this government, to make mental health services on campus a priority now.

Again to the Acting Premier: Will he commit today to ensuring that young people struggling with mental health crises don't have to wait for access to the supports and resources they so urgently need?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for her advocacy and for the question. We all know that mental health is a major issue for every person in society. The stats tell us that one out of four people experiences some kind of mental health problem in their lifetime, so it's an issue.

But we have a mental health strategy in the province of Ontario. Part of that strategy is to assist the students in our universities and colleges. For example, we developed and introduced the Mental Health Innovation Fund in March 2013 in order to assist our students. We have also

introduced the Good2Talk program, which helps students get counselling from experts 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

We are doing whatever we can to make sure that our students have a very healthy university and college time when they are at the post-secondary institutions.

VISITORS

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm very pleased to join the member from Scarborough—Agincourt in welcoming grade 6 student Adam Omarali, who watched question period. When I met him this morning, he told me that his favourite subject was math.

Welcome, Adam, to you and your family.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington on a point of order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, earlier this morning you made a ruling on a point of privilege. I seek your indulgence just for clarification on that ruling on two elements, if I may.

The first element: In my initial notice of the point of privilege, I raised two standing orders, 21(c) and 33(d). I may be mistaken, but I listened intently and I did not hear reference to standing order 33(d) in your ruling.

The second element, if I could seek clarification—not only for myself but I think for all members of the House: As you know, on Thursday, I filed a notice of a point of privilege consistent with the standing orders, and that's a notice of intent and a notice of the point of privilege. In all previous practices that I've been engaged in, the member is then afforded an opportunity to compile the complete arguments and either submit them orally or written, or both, at the Speaker's prerogative, before the ruling is completed. As you're aware, I completed my arguments and filed them with you at the beginning of question period, but it appears to me that the ruling was done in advance of the arguments.

If I could just have clarification on that practice, Speaker, so that if that is the way it is to be done, we will do our points of privilege consistent—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. To provide you the clarity, all relevant information that was germane to my ruling was mentioned.

Number two, I have the standing orders that I quoted. That provides me with the opportunity to make that ruling at any time. I don't need to have a written submission. I can make the ruling on the initial submission.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on a point of order.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I wish to correct my record. Earlier when I referenced the PC leader's relationship

with the specialist group Concerned Ontario Doctors, I said that their communications adviser Dan Robertson was a former staffer in the PC leader's office. In fact, he is not or was not. He is identified by the *Globe and Mail* as a member of the PC leader's "core campaign team."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes this morning. Therefore, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a pleasure to introduce three people here today: Christian Broughton, who's here for a petition we'll be reading in; his mother, Patricia Melanson, who used to be a Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs assistant; and Donald Melanson, her husband. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING WEEK

Mr. Jeff Yurek: During Community Health and Wellbeing Week, between September 26 and October 1, 108 members of the Association of Ontario Health Centres across Ontario are mounting special events across the province around the theme "Community Health and Wellbeing: Shift the Conversation."

The week is about starting a new conversation about health and health care in Ontario. Treating illness is important, but Ontario needs to do a much better job in preventing people from getting sick in the first place. The need is urgent.

Primary health organizations participating in the week include Ontario's community health centres, aboriginal health access centres, community-governed family health teams and nurse practitioner-led clinics. Throughout the week, they'll be organizing community events throughout the province to demonstrate the value and impact of their efforts, especially for populations most at risk for poor health.

One approach they're highlighting is how they put people and communities first. Each member of the association is governed by community members. These centres are run by the community for the community. In my riding, that's how it works at Central Community Health Centre in St. Thomas, and this is how it works for other community organizations throughout the province.

The strategy the community health centres are also taking on is to prioritize health promotion. The goal is to prevent more in order to treat less.

This kind of people- and community-centred approach that prioritizes comprehensive health promotion pro-

gramming is what you'll find in action at Ontario's community health centres. This is the approach that will promote the best possible health care and well-being for everyone.

WATER EXTRACTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just say no to Nestlé. I've been boycotting Nestlé since the 1970s when Nestlé—and they're still doing it—were pushing formula on women in developing nations who didn't even have access to clean water and causing infant death. Some call that criminal; I would agree with them.

Right now, Ontario charges Nestlé just \$3.71 for every million litres of water they take, and they're taking more than one million litres of water from a well in the town of Hillsburgh, Ontario and bottling it for sale every day.

Former Environmental Commissioner Ellen Schwartzel took the Liberals to task in her annual report for not acting on recommendations to raise the amount it charges to take large amounts of water, which she called a "drop in the bucket." Schwartzel pointed out that even the ministry conceded that \$3.71 was just giving it away. It was 1.2% of the government's total water quantity management costs. Quebec, by comparison, charges \$70 per million litres. We charge \$3.71, overriding municipalities' calls—and only the Minister of the Environment can do something about this.

With only a few seconds left: Don't buy bottled water. Do sign the Council of Canadians petition. Beg the Minister of the Environment and the Liberal government to act on this and act now. Just say no to Nestlé.

ADAM OMARALI

Ms. Soo Wong: It is an honour for me today to rise to recognize a 10-year-old student in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, Adam Omarali, for his achievements with the Pokémon trading card game. Adam is currently a grade 6 student at the Islamic Foundation School.

The Pokémon trading card game, not to be confused with Pokémon Go, is one of the most established games of its kind in the world. Adam ranks number one in North America for the 2016 competitive season—first out of 500 junior players in Canada and the United States, and his 1,245 championship points outrank players in Mexico.

This past August, Adam represented Canada at the Pokémon Trading Card Game World Championships in San Francisco. From the world championship, Adam received a US\$1,500 scholarship, among other recognitions. He currently holds the title of the number one player in Canada.

For a 10-year-old, Adam is mature beyond his years. He's been playing for only one year and he's participated in the international arena. Adam is a studious, determined young boy who constantly improves his skills by practising two hours every day. As a result, he's acquired many

skills, including responding quickly and strategically, being focused and assessing various risks and their impacts.

I'd like to congratulate Adam again for his amazing achievements to date, and I know all of us in this House will be hearing a lot about Adam in the years ahead. Congratulations, Adam.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Go Pokémon.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to share concerns I've heard from my constituents over the summer.

Over and over I heard about the impact of high hydro rates. I heard it from seniors and families who are struggling to pay their bills. I heard it from businesses that are struggling to compete with companies in jurisdictions with less expensive power. And I heard it from municipalities that are struggling to attract jobs but are having trouble competing because of Ontario's high hydro rates.

The people of Ontario need this government to recognize the impact of their decisions on the cost of living and the cost of doing business. They have to realize the high cost of hydro along with all other increases is leaving people struggling to make ends meet.

I heard from people who are frustrated with cancelled surgeries and long wait times. They're frustrated that there isn't enough money for health care but there is enough money for radio ads to tell us how well the government thinks they're doing.

People in my riding continue to be concerned by the risk to our drinking water if the proposed landfill site is allowed to go ahead near the Thames River.

And we're all concerned about our youth and how much they are struggling.

I will continue to raise these issues because I believe that we can have an Ontario where people aren't scared to open their hydro bills, our drinking water is safe and our young people have hope for a bright future.

Thank you very much for allowing me to make this statement.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I am pleased to rise to share the important work the NDP is undertaking to eliminate all forms of racism, including Islamophobia, in our great province. Dialogue, conversation, asking questions, seeking knowledge—these are all the things that combat ignorance and hatred.

New Democrats have been working diligently to find ways to combat racism in Ontario. We have called for an end to arbitrary race-based police checks and carding. We've pushed the Premier to finally set up an Anti-Racism Directorate and have been vocal advocates for the series of public community meetings now being held in towns and cities across the province to address the directorate's mission and goals.

Shortly, New Democrats will be introducing legislation to proclaim the month of October as Islamic Heritage Month. It's time to formally recognize the vital contributions Muslims in Ontario make to our vibrant social, economic, political and cultural fabric.

The sad reality is that Islamophobia is a very serious problem in Ontario. Every Ontarian deserves to feel safe and secure so they can reach their potential. By learning about and celebrating the contributions that Canadians of Islamic heritage have made throughout our province's history, we become stronger as a province.

New Democrats will continue to show true leadership by standing by the belief that Ontario is at its best when no one is left behind.

WOMEN'S HABITAT

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I was delighted earlier this month to attend an open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony at Women's Habitat in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore that was held to mark the completion of renovations at its outreach centre. Thanks to a \$66,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation awarded earlier this year, Women's Habitat made enhancements to its program space and installed commercial kitchen equipment.

I'm very pleased to have an organization like Women's Habitat in my riding that provides services like individual and group counselling, transition and support services, housing assistance and programs for women.

As Silvia Samsa, executive director of Women's Habitat, stated, "This generous support from Trillium could not have come sooner." The former kitchen was simply not able to accommodate the needs of an organization that serves over 9,200 meals each year. Many clients advised staff that these meals are often the only meal they have during a day. This renovated kitchen will allow for workshops on cooking on a budget and healthy eating for kids.

1310

Women's Habitat has provided emergency shelter to women and children who are survivors of violence in Etobicoke–Lakeshore since 1978. This outreach centre has been in place since 2006, and we're all very fortunate to have this organization in Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

I'm so grateful for this support from Trillium, which will allow Women's Habitat to provide enhanced services to the community.

INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to recognize the success of the IPM 2016, the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo. The town of Minto in the county of Wellington was home to this year's plowing match. Tens of thousands of people, including MPPs of all parties, saw the importance of agriculture in our rural communities.

This year's theme was "A Fresh Taste of Farming." There were many highlights: the parade, the plowing

competitions, the Queen of the Furrow competition, and the zip line, to name just a few. There was also plenty of food, including a farmers' market, food demonstrations, and samples. The tented city covered over 100 acres and 500 exhibitors.

For pulling off such a successful event, many people deserve our thanks: chairman Ron Faulkner and the IPM executive, for their tireless dedication and years of planning and preparation; the Ontario Plowmen's Association; Anne and Earl Schneider, for welcoming us to their farm and hosting the IPM; other landowners, who donated 1,200 acres to be used for the match; and, finally, the countless volunteers whose work makes this possible.

Dave Adsett, publisher of the Wellington Advertiser, put it this way: "Although agriculture remains a vital facet of Ontario's economy, most residents are far enough removed from farm life that such an exhibition helps re-establish the connection between rural and urban residents." I totally agree. That's what makes the IPM such an important event for us all.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: Every year, we celebrate Right to Know Week during the last week of September. This year marks the 250th anniversary of the world's first access-to-information legislation. Since 1766, when Sweden became the first country to recognize that citizens have a right to access unpublished information produced by its government, over 100 countries have passed some form of freedom-of-information laws.

Next year, Ontario marks the 30th anniversary of our own Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. As I'm sure everyone in this legislative chamber today will agree, freedom of information is essential to a strong democracy and to good governance. While we have come a long way in ensuring greater transparency of our governments and the public's right to know, we still have a very long way to go. There are very real challenges to freedom of information in Ontario.

In July this year, our new Financial Accountability Officer, Mr. Stephen LeClair, was again forced to complain about the Liberal government stonewalling his office by invoking cabinet confidence on requests for information. By refusing FAO access, they are preventing him from doing his job as an independent officer of this Legislature.

Last year, I introduced a private member's bill that would further empower the FAO to readily gain access to information needed to perform his duties by removing the cabinet-confidence exemption, and I'd like to let the House know that I will once again be introducing this legislation.

GEOFFREY REAUME

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: With your permission, Speaker, I'd like to introduce new terminology to the Ontario

conversation, and that is the discipline of "mad studies." For that purpose, I would invite the House to please welcome Professor Geoffrey Reaume and his wife, Esther Lee Reaume. Professor Reaume has a remarkable history. Diagnosed himself with schizophrenia as a teenager, he went on to complete a bachelor's, master's and PhD, and is now a professor of critical disability studies at York University.

He is here today to present, Speaker, to us, collectively, and to Ontario as well as to the legislative library, having just shown this book to the Premier. He's co-editor of a book called *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*. What this book and this entire discipline attempt to do is to move beyond the psychiatric or medical model of madness, or mental illness, and actually talk from the perspective of the patients themselves. That is what Professor Reaume is an expert in.

He's challenging the belief system that makes it okay to pick on, make fun of, discriminate, reject, silence, discredit, pathologize, de-centre, kindly undermine and commit violence against the mad.

I have to say, as a physician and a parliamentarian, that somehow I missed the existence of this entire discipline, so I'd like to remedy that collectively and welcome Professor Reaume.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

289619 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2016

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr47, An Act to revive 289619 Ontario Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

ISLAMIC HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE MOIS DU PATRIMOINE MUSULMAN

Ms. Armstrong moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 23, An Act to proclaim the month of October Islamic Heritage Month / Projet de loi 23, Loi proclamant le mois d'octobre Mois du patrimoine musulman.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: For generations, Muslims have been contributing to all aspects of Ontario's prosperity and diverse heritage. Islamic history and culture encompass a broad range of individuals and experiences, as well as important contributions to literature, math, science, art and history.

By proclaiming the month of October as Islamic Heritage Month, the province of Ontario recognizes the important contribution Muslims in Ontario make as part of the vibrant social, economic, political and cultural fabric.

Islamic Heritage Month is an opportunity to reflect, celebrate and educate all generations about the contribution of a rich and diverse Islamic history and the important contributions Muslim people make to communities across Ontario.

Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

Islamic Heritage Month

1. The month of October in each year is proclaimed as Islamic Heritage Month.

Commencement

2. This act comes into force on the day it receives royal assent.

Short title

3. The short title of this act is the Islamic Heritage Month Act, 2016.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to offer a reminder: If that's not in the explanatory note, you're supposed to make those kinds of statements while the bill is being debated.

So the reminder for everybody is to read from the explanatory note, of what the bill is. You're just describing what the bill does.

MEN'S HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA SEMAINE DE LA SENSIBILISATION À LA SANTÉ DES HOMMES

Mr. Potts moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 24, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men's Health Awareness Week / Projet de loi 24, Loi proclamant la semaine précédant le troisième dimanche de juin Semaine de la sensibilisation à la santé des hommes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Arthur Potts: As we all know, the third Sunday in June is Father's Day. The week preceding it is an opportunity for men to think about prostate health, think about their mental health and go see a doctor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That's no different than the other one—explanatory notes, please.

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PETITIONS

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premier has admitted that she and all ministers have set quotas of funds they are required to raise for the Ontario Liberal Party;

"Whereas recent and repeated media stories have raised the public perception that ministers are meeting their fundraising quotas by soliciting donations from the companies and associations who have active files before their respective ministries;

"Whereas recent media stories have raised the public perception that decisions on government grants, contracts and policy changes are heavily influenced by the said donations;

"Whereas these perceptions of impropriety have shattered the public's trust in this government;

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to know the truth about this government.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To call on the government to immediately call a commission of public inquiry to investigate how the current government does business with donors to the Ontario Liberal Party."

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it with page Zoe.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to thank Mike and Helen Hurteau from my riding for this petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas once you privatize Hydro One, there's no return; and

"Whereas we'll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"Whereas we'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"Whereas we'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Amelia to bring it to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have some signatures from among the 25,000 sent to me since the start of the summer, on a petition entitled "Update Ontario Fluoridation Legislation." It reads as follows:

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that community water fluoridation is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations, including the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Ontario Dental Association; and

"Whereas recent experience in Canadian cities that have removed fluoride from drinking water has led ... to a dramatic increase in tooth decay; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care urges support for amending the Fluoridation Act to ensure community water fluoridation is mandatory; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing urges support for the removal of provisions allowing Ontario municipalities to cease drinking water fluoridation, or fail to start drinking water fluoridation, from the Ontario Municipal Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Premier of Ontario direct the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Health and Long-Term Care to amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario before the end of the" current session of the Ontario Parliament.

Speaker, this is signed by a number of people from Windsor, Ontario, which has lost fluoridation.

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to send it down with page Jack.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition with regard to electricity rates. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current ... government took office;

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment;

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss;

"Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government's lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating;

"Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

"Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians' electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians' energy bills."

Madam Speaker, I have signed this and I will give it to page Brendan.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition in support of a \$15 minimum wage, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are affected by the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are unprotected by current minimum standards outlined in employment and labour laws; and

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Implement a minimum wage of \$15 an hour."

I'm proud to affix my name to this and will give it to page Tori to take to the table.

ICE MACHINES

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to have Chris Broughton and his family here for this petition that he has put together.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ice machines are found everywhere throughout the health care system, including long-term-care facilities and hospitals; and

"Whereas numerous bacteria and viruses are known to contaminate ice cubes, including cholera, typhoid fever, salmonella, legionella, E. coli, shigella, hepatitis A and norovirus; and

"Whereas the lack of regulation increases the probability of consuming ice from ice machines with unhygienic levels of bacteria and/or viruses, putting public safety at risk; and

"Whereas individuals consuming ice from a contaminated ice machine in a hospital or long-term-care facility are at a greater risk due to potentially weakened immune systems; and

"Whereas the inherent risk and rate at which both bacteria and biofilm grow inside ice machines have caused other countries to mandate the cleaning of ice machines; and

"Whereas there are currently no mandates or guidelines on the frequency or thoroughness of cleaning for institutional ice machines in hospitals, long-term-care or other health care facilities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario establish and enforce cleaning and hygiene standards for all institutional ice machines in provincially funded and/or operated facilities."

I agree with this petition and the health risks being caused, and I sign it and leave it with page Cameron.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector; and

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent implementation of the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

"Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario" as follows:

"To immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I fully support it, will affix my name and send it with the great page from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Paul.

1330

SPEED LIMITS

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to resubmit this petition. It was signed by thousands of people, but sadly, it died when the House was prorogued.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas driving at a high rate of speed has contributed to many fatal snowmobile accidents on lakes and rivers across Ontario; and

"Whereas the safety of individuals is put at risk when snowmobiles are driven at a high rate of speed on lakes, rivers and within close proximity to people, ice huts and other vehicles; and

"Whereas section 14 of the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act, RSO 1990, c. M.44 states:

"No person shall drive a motorized snow vehicle at a greater rate of speed than,

"(a) 20 kilometres per hour,

"(i) on a highway where the speed limit established pursuant to the Highway Traffic Act is 50 kilometres per hour or less, or

"(ii) in any public park or exhibition grounds; or

"(b) 50 kilometres per hour,

"(i) on any highway which is open to motor vehicle traffic, where the speed limit established pursuant to the Highway Traffic Act is greater than 50 kilometres per hour'...

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(a) No person shall drive a motorized vehicle at a greater rate of speed than;

"(i) 20 km per hour within 200 feet of any person, ice hut or other vehicles

"(ii) 80 km per hour on frozen waterways

"(iii) set speeding fine for driving in excess of 20 km/h when within 200 feet of person, ice hut or vehicle

"(iv) set speeding fine for driving in excess of 80 km/h on a frozen waterway."

I would like to submit this petition and give it to the desk with page Gideon.

ICE MACHINES

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition to establish and enforce cleaning and hygiene standards for commercial ice machines in health care facilities in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ice machines are found everywhere throughout the health care system, including long-term-care facilities and hospitals; and

"Whereas numerous bacteria and viruses are known to contaminate ice cubes, including cholera, typhoid fever, salmonella, legionella, E. coli, shigella, hepatitis A and norovirus; and

"Whereas the lack of regulation increases the probability of consuming ice from ice machines with unhygienic levels of bacteria and/or viruses, putting public safety at risk; and

"Whereas individuals consuming ice from a contaminated ice machine in a hospital or long-term-care facility are at a greater risk due to potentially weakened immune systems; and

"Whereas the inherent risk and rate at which both bacteria and biofilm grow inside ice machines have caused other countries to mandate the cleaning of ice machines; and

"Whereas there are currently no mandates or guidelines on the frequency or thoroughness of cleaning for institutional ice machines in hospitals, long-term-care homes or other health care facilities;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario establish and enforce cleaning and hygiene standards for all institutional ice machines in provincially funded and/or operated facilities."

I agree with this petition, will affix my initials, and give it to page Nicole.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current government under Premier Kathleen Wynne is calling for the sale of up to 60% of Hydro One shares into private ownership; and

"Whereas the decision to sell the public utility was made without any public input and the deal will continue to be done in complete secrecy; and

"Whereas the loss of majority ownership in Hydro One will force ratepayers to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, such as higher rates; and

"Whereas electricity rates are already sky-high and hurting family budgets as well as businesses; and

"Whereas ratepayers will never again have independent investigations of consumer complaints, such as the Ontario Ombudsman's damning report on failed billing; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario are the true owners of Hydro One and they do not believe the fire sale of Hydro One is in their best interest;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To protect Ontario ratepayers by stopping the sale of Hydro One."

I fully support it, will affix my name, and send it with page Jesse.

DISASTER RELIEF

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Bert Brazeau, who is a man from Timmins. He collected over 300 names, so I want to thank him for that. It reads as follows:

"Gogama Needs Help.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas at 2 a.m. on March 7, 2015, a Canadian National train derailed in Gogama;

"Whereas this derailment caused numerous tank cars carrying crude oil to explode, catch fire and spill over one million litres of oil into the Makami River; and

"Whereas residents continue to plainly observe oil and find dead fish in the Makami River as well as Lake Minisinakwa, despite the fact that the Ministry of the Environment has declared the cleanup complete;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Environment require CN to continue the cleanup of Gogama's soil and waterways until the residents are assured of clean and safe water for themselves, the environment and the wildlife."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Ryan to bring it to the Clerk.

RURAL AND NORTHERN ONTARIO TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the loss of transportation service will further destabilize rural economies and impede on residents' ability to get to school, work, doctor or hospital appointments, or any other service unavailable locally;

"Whereas the prosperity, productivity and participation of all segments of society depends on a viable, accessible transportation network;

"Whereas the lack of a transportation service negatively impacts those people with special needs, accessibility challenges, seniors and those living below the poverty level;

"Whereas Greyhound Canada plans to cut bus service and Via Rail plans to cut train service in rural Ontario;

"Whereas there is no secondary carrier serving rural Ontario's students, workers, volunteers, tourists, business travellers and any resident without a driver's licence;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately strike an all-party committee at Queen's Park to study transportation needs in rural and northern Ontario."

I fully support it, will affix my name, and send it with page Adam.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. The time for petitions now has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO REBATE FOR ELECTRICITY CONSUMERS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA REMISE DE L'ONTARIO POUR LES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉLECTRICITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 22, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act in respect of the cost of electricity /
Projet de loi 13, Loi concernant le coût de l'électricité.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on this very important bill, Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act.

As the members would know, this bill is very comprehensive in nature, in providing some very important relief for Ontario consumers of electricity. It's a bill that really covers the entire breadth and scope of our province and the needs of Ontarians in their everyday lives.

This bill, if passed, really would put a three-part plan in place. One, it will rebate Ontario's portion of HST for families and small businesses, a savings of 8% or \$130 annually for the average household. Essentially, Madam Speaker, it is a tax cut. What the bill provides for is to cut the 8% provincial HST tax off electricity hydro rates. So that's what it is in essence. Consumers, right on their bill, no longer will pay—if this bill is passed—the 8% portion of HST on all electricity use. That is a very significant tax cut—a cut in HST—that is provided for in this legislation.

The second thing it does is it increases protection for rural and remote customers of electricity, resulting in a net benefit for these households of 20%, or \$540 on average. So we are looking at those consumers in rural or remote areas who live in low-density areas. We recognize that these are places where there are not a lot of people living, that there are fewer people living in this area and that they're far away from where the majority of the people in this province live.

Of course, Speaker, it is costly to supply electricity in those areas. You don't need to understand all the ins and outs of economics in the electricity sector to understand that if you're going to provide a product at a far distance, it is going to cost more money. Therefore, we know that the distribution charge in those areas tends to be significantly higher because they are further from where most Ontarians live and they are low density. In other words, there are fewer people who live there so it costs more to provide electricity in those areas. We are taking an additional step in reducing the distribution cost for those consumers to provide for them a savings of 20% from their bills, which will be roughly about \$540 per year on average, a very significant plan in terms of providing savings for rural and remote customers.

1340

The third thing this bill does is provide supports for our large and medium-sized businesses. The first part of the plan that I outlined, which was cutting the provincial HST from all hydro bills, would apply to all residential customers and small businesses as well. This third part of the plan deals with large and medium-sized businesses. What it does is it expands the industrial conservation initiative, making it possible for newly eligible medium and large businesses to achieve savings of as much as one third of their bill.

This program has been in existence for large businesses for some time. Basically what it does is it incentivizes those businesses to move their production or move their use of electricity to low peak times. That has two very important results. One, not only does it reduce the cost for the manufacturer to use electricity when it's cheapest to use, but also, most importantly, it takes a load off the entire electricity grid. What it does is it allows for fewer people, fewer businesses, large businesses, using electricity at peak times when it is most costly to produce electricity—to a period which is at a low peak time or a low time when it's cheaper to produce electricity. So it's a win-win: a win for businesses to be able to use cheaper electricity, but also a win for the entire system and therefore a win for all users because all of a sudden, you don't have to produce electricity when it's the most expensive time to produce electricity.

What we are doing through this program is we're expanding the criteria for the program for other large businesses and for medium businesses as well. Our hope is—and I think there's a good indication that we have support from business groups like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—that that is going to create more opportunity for large and medium-sized businesses to participate in this program, again saving money for themselves, but also saving money for the entire electricity system. That results in lower hydro rates for consumers as well. This is a very comprehensive plan that has been put forward by the government, again, really thinking through all different aspects of the users in the system.

Now, it's interesting that I really don't hear a lot of opposition to this plan from the opposition parties. They may try to spin it every which way. This is exactly the kind of thing they were trying to promote. It will be very interesting to see them vote against this bill and tell Ontarians that they really don't believe they should get a break. But I recall that this is exactly the kind of thing they were hoping the government would do, and now the government is doing it. Of course, you hear all kinds of spin or rhetoric from the opposition parties, but that's the nature of the game and I guess we all understand. Ontarians will see through it.

Madam Speaker, I really wanted to take some time, in the time that's allotted to me, to have another very important conversation, because I think when it comes to talking about electricity, the cost of electricity, what it takes to produce electricity and what kind of electricity you produce, for all those things you see very simplistic rhetoric coming from all sides, from all directions. I think this is a very important topic.

Interjections.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Heckling notwithstanding, this is a very important conversation and topic which I think Ontarians deserve and demand to know more about. This is the kind of conversation that I have with my constituents all the time when I am out every week knocking on doors in my community. It's a healthy conversation to have.

Now, I've taken some time to learn a little bit more about our electricity system: how it operates, what the

challenges are within the system, where the opportunities are and what the government has done over the last 10 or so years to improve our electricity system. One of the things that I've learned, first of all, is that the economics around our electricity system are very similar to the economics around the health care system. It's complex, it's unique, and one has to be able to understand it fully.

Madam Speaker, I'm very sorry. I am remiss that I did not tell you that I will be sharing my time with the members for Barrie and Northumberland–Quinte West and the President of the Treasury Board. I just got that in—so thank you very much for the helpful note that came my way to tell you. I was just so into the things I wanted to talk about; now there's pressure on me to leave some time for three other members who will be speaking after me.

As I was saying, Madam Speaker, it's important to understand—I think it's incumbent on all members to make sure that our constituents understand how the electricity system works, because it is a complex system. It's a system that you can't really put out in a 30-second sound bite or a 140-character tweet. I think it's just like trying to explain to somebody how our health care system works—and Madam Speaker, you are a nurse by profession, so you very much know how the health care system works. It's a complex system. It has a lot of design aspects to it, and it's important to understand the entire breadth and scope of it.

When I'm asked the question by my constituents as to why we have seen increases in the price of hydro, which is a legitimate question to ask—

Mr. Bill Walker: Gas plants.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: You know, I heard some heckling. This is the kind of rhetoric that we hear all the time, which is so not fair. I think it undermines and insults—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, it not only insults the intelligence of Ontarians, but it also provides not-so-correct information, or false information.

So here's the answer I give to my constituents—

Mr. Norm Miller: Read the auditor's report.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: You might want to hear this, and if you disagree with this, you should knock on doors in my riding, tell my constituents otherwise and see how much they believe you.

The answer that I always give in the conversations that I engage in with my constituents is that, first and foremost, something that I think is extremely, very important to all of us, and something that I know my constituents in Ottawa Centre value very much, is the work that we have done to clean up our electricity system.

Madam Speaker, our electricity system was basically dependent on burning coal—pure coal, that black stuff that you can hold in your hands. We got rid of it. We are the first jurisdiction in North America which does not, anymore, burn dirty coal to produce electricity. That is incredible. That is amazing. This is what President Obama is now saying the United States should be going

to, and other jurisdictions are looking forward to it. So in fact, Ontario has been a leader when it comes to eliminating the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the province—in fact, in the country.

To the point, Madam Speaker: You may remember that former Prime Minister Harper was even trying to take credit for that action that was taken by the Ontario Liberal government. It was out of nowhere. It was kind of amusing to watch, how he was trying to take credit: “Oh, Canada has done great stuff, because we eliminated coal.” Well, no, Mr. Prime Minister. It's not the federal government. The Ontario government has taken that very important and difficult decision of taking coal—dirty coal—out of our system and no longer relying on that to produce electricity. That was a huge source of emissions, and it caused serious problems.

The other thing we have done, Madam Speaker—time is limited for me—is that we have invested a significant amount of money in making our system reliable. We are talking about \$30 billion invested in new and refurbished generation since 2003 and over \$13 billion of improvements in the Hydro One system, including upgrades to over 11,000 kilometres of power lines.

All of this is to say that this has a cost to the system, and that's where we have seen increases within our system, because all that investment has resulted in making sure that not only do we have a clean electricity system, we have a reliable and secure electricity system. But we are at a point now that we have done those investments. We are starting to see that the costs that were increasing are plateauing.

We are also making sure that there is relief provided to hydro customers. Eliminating the HST portion, the provincial portion, from the bills is a very significant step.

1350

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Barrie.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My, you look lovely today.

Just to go on from where my colleague the minister left off, I'd like to read some quotes from people who have some different views than the opposition.

Allan O'Dette, the CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, said, “We are happy about this. This is the right thing to do, particularly so that the medium-sized enterprises can remain competitive relative to our largest competitor, which is just across the lake.”

Francesca Dobbyn, executive director of United Way of Grey Bruce, said to the Owen Sound Sun Times, “I would like to thank the minister for listening to the concerns of rural Ontario's rural residents, who are struggling to pay their electrical bills. As we head into the cold winter months, the provincial government's new efforts will go a long way in helping Ontarians keep their lights on, especially in Bruce and Grey counties.”

Also, Kate Holmes, CEO of United Way Milton, told the Milton Canadian Champion, “United Way Milton is pleased to support this initiative. This will help reduce financial stress on people who are using United Way Milton-funded programs.”

Hugh Thompson, president of Cambridge Towel, told CBC News, "If we reduce our cost we are able to become more efficient.

"If we become more efficient we can offer more goods to the market at a lower cost, and if we do that we'll grow our volume, and if we grow our volume we'll hire more people."

Linda Hasenfratz, CEO of Linamar, told GuelphToday.com that hydro incentives work, not only in helping make Ontario manufacturers more competitive in the global marketplace through reduced costs, but they also motivate manufacturers to invest in measures that reduce their hydro consumption.

Alan Spacek, mayor of Kapuskasing and president of the northeastern Ontario municipal association, told the Kapuskasing Times, "We are pleased that the government has committed to assisting these groups with their energy costs by introducing legislation that would rebate the province's share of the harmonized sales tax from residential and small business electricity bills as well as supporting industry by expanding and lowering the threshold of eligibility for the industrial conservation initiative."

Across the aisle, many people would say that—the opposition criticisms would be that it's too little, too late and they're band-aid solutions.

Our government has heard from Ontarians and is committed to helping them with the costs of everyday living. Through this three-point plan, our government will reduce the cost on electricity bills across the board.

In a recent report, the independent Financial Accountability Officer refuted many of the claims that were made about our energy policy by the opposition, and confirmed that the average family in Ontario spends less money on electricity than in every other province except British Columbia. Let me repeat that: The independent Financial Accountability Officer said that the claims about our energy policy—confirmed that the average family in Ontario spends less money on electricity than in every other province except British Columbia. It also confirmed that total home heating and cooling costs are in the middle of the pack when compared to other provinces.

Ontario's electricity prices are in line with comparative jurisdictions. Ontario's prices are nearly half of what they are in American cities like Chicago, Boston, New York and Los Angeles.

What's really remarkable about comparing Ontario to other provinces and states is that we've already done the heavy lifting in rebuilding our system and getting off dirty and cheap coal while other jurisdictions still need to undertake that work. Ontario will benefit from our leadership.

That said, we know that the investments we have made to modernize and clean up our electricity supply have put cost pressures on some families. That's exactly why we've introduced these measures, which offer significant support to Ontarians.

The proposed HST rebate will be available to all consumers eligible for the regulated price plan. This

includes about five million residential consumers, small businesses and farms.

This rebate is permanent. It is being enacted through legislation and, as such, will be law and require legislation to overturn it. Consumers won't have to do anything to receive the rebate. It will be automatically added to their bill.

Ontario has made a decision to effectively eliminate provincial taxes from electricity bills. The fastest, most efficient way to achieve this is through an immediate on-bill rebate of the provincial part of the HST.

It's also important to remember that on January 1, 2016, the debt retirement charge was eliminated from residential bills and the Ontario Electricity Support Program was launched to provide low-income families with up to \$75 each month. I know many of my constituents with lower incomes have taken advantage of that.

This legislation is part of a holistic package this government has introduced to ensure affordable access to electricity. Taken together, families are receiving far more than through the OCEB.

I also want to remind everyone that the government remains committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18, while continuing to invest in the economy, our people and a healthy, clean and prosperous low-carbon future.

These investments will help enhance the public services that Ontarians rely on, as well as to stimulate economic growth—because we do need more jobs in Ontario.

Our plan is in action. Our plan is working, and I will fully support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: At first blush, this bill sounds very attractive. The government is going to give us money, so they're going to subsidize consumers, very much like they subsidize electricity production with solar and wind. We will be given back the provincial sales tax that we pay on our hydro bills, which we didn't pay until it was put on some years ago by this government. So we get it back—8%.

Additionally, we're going to get another 20% if we happen to be in rural Ontario. That's wonderful. We appreciate that. Now, we have to look at a couple of things. Rural Ontario is paying more than urban Ontario, to start with. Basically, what you're giving us back is money that we never should have paid in the first place. Also, electricity costs in the last 12 years that this government has been in power have gone up 400%. That's about 28% a year. We get a gift for a year, and at the end of one year, the gift runs out, and then we go back to increasing rates of hydro.

The bill also doesn't talk about where the billion-dollar cost comes from—because when you give us money, it has to come from somewhere. Where does it come from? Well, there's only one public purse, and there's only one taxpayer. So the guy who pays the hydro bill who's getting 28% is going to pay the 28% somewhere else, whether it's another tax, more debt or something of that nature.

Wind and solar power don't work because they require big subsidies. That is the problem from the beginning. That is the mismanagement of hydro policy in Ontario. Really, what we should have done instead of going with wind and solar from Korea was go with hydroelectricity from our neighbour Quebec.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to add my voice today on Bill 13, discussing this rebate the government is proposing: to take 8% off our bills that never should have been on there in the first place. New Democrats have been saying for the past six years that this 8% should never be on there, that the provincial portion of the HST that we're going to see taken off in the form of a rebate never should have been on there in the first place. I don't think anyone on this side of the room would argue that. It never should have been on there. They're taking something off with great fanfare and we're all supposed to say thank you, and while we're glad to have it, it never should have been on there in the first place.

1400

In response to the Attorney General's comments about businesses and appreciating what's being put forward in this bill, that's great. We want there to be some relief for businesses, for our families, for the average Ontarian who is trying to pay their bills, make ends meet, keep their lights on and stay warm while doing it. But when I've talked to businesses in my community—small businesses and big businesses—they would really like to see a bold plan enacted, because they want to be able to do business here in Ontario. Individuals want to be able to continue to pay their bills.

To hear the minister talk about how the economics of electricity are like health care—he said that it's very complex. I would say that it shouldn't be complex. We're talking about light; we're talking about heat. We're talking about the ability to do business, the ability to stay warm in the province of Ontario, and that should be simple. These are essential topics we're talking about.

To the member from Barrie who's going to cite quotes from the Financial Accountability Officer: The Financial Accountability Officer no longer has jurisdiction over this. He can't see behind the Liberal curtain they've put up. He was making comments about energy that were not specific to electricity. So if we're going to have a conversation, let's have a real one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Han Dong: I'm very pleased to be able to speak to this bill, Bill 13, a very important bill to my constituency of Trinity-Spadina.

I had the pleasure of accompanying the Premier last year to visit China. We brought back lots and lots of trade agreements. While I was there, I experienced the awful smog days in Beijing. I was thinking to myself that they are, I think, the second-largest economy in the world, along with the largest economy in the world—

down south—and they are still using energy generated by coal. But here we are. In Ontario, we'll be able to enjoy clean air—no smog days in the summer. I think that's something that everyone, every resident of Ontario, should cherish.

To any constituent who comes to my office and talks about hydro prices, I would point out to them that with this new bill, they will see an 8% deduction, an 8% rebate on their future bills. But we've done more than that. In the past, we introduced the removal of the debt retirement charge two years earlier than planned. That saves average families \$65 a year. The Ontario Electricity Support Program for low- and modest-income families saves the average family \$430 a year. The Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit gives families up to \$1,008 per year, and seniors \$1,148 per year.

When they come to me, I will introduce these government programs to them. I hope that the members from the opposite side do the same when their constituents go to them as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and accounts?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: What's interesting to me about this whole debate on Bill 13 is that the government side actually believes what they're talking about. I see a number of faces that were in Wellington county last week at the plowing match, sitting over there on the other side. When they tried to tell this to the ordinary folks at the plowing match, guess what happened? They all got booed, and booed severely. The general public does not believe this bafflegab that they're trying to press on the people of Ontario. It was incredible, the amount of people in that audience that didn't and won't believe what this government is trying to shove down their throats.

It's interesting that they will talk about this 8% reduction in their bills to ratepayers in Ontario, and they'll show that very proudly on the hydro bills, but they won't do that with the cap-and-trade system. They're going to hide that. They will not put that as a second line item because they don't want people to know what it's costing them for cap-and-trade.

I had a cottage owner come to me a while ago. He showed me his hydro bill. A lot of people; a lot of the MPPs in this Legislature have got these bills. He shut his power off all winter—shut it off. He used zero power. He got about a \$100 bill for a delivery charge. "Delivery of what?" he asked me. I said, "Delivery of nothing."

You know, it would be pretty easy to make a living in the sales business if you were selling stuff and you could get \$100 from somebody and not have to deliver it. That's a pretty good deal. That's what this government is trying to shove down the throats of Ontarians, and they're just not believing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That completes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Barrie to reply.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My thanks to the Attorney General and the MPPs from Mississippi Mills, Oshawa, Trinity-Spadina and Perth-Wellington.

Just to end, I'd like to say that this act represents approximately a \$1-billion investment, ensuring affordable electricity for Ontarians. This investment is made possible by the sound fiscal management of this government, which is bringing us to a balanced budget.

Our government believes that the first people who should benefit from the government's fiscal balance are the taxpayers of Ontario; that's exactly what we're proposing with this act. Delivery is expensive to rural areas; that's why we're helping them a little more with the plan than others. Also, our sound fiscal management is making a lot of things possible. By the time our plan is done, Ontario will be in a very good state.

We inherited an electricity system that was in a shambles. Nothing had been done. And let me tell you, it wasn't just by the opposition parties; it was for many, many governments before. There were so many things that needed to be done: All the transmission lines needed to be changed and updated.

Interjections.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I hear the people across the hall there talking about how terrible the smart meters are. Let me tell you what the smart meters do. Smart meters are used by Hydro One. They can tell immediately if a house is having difficulty with—if their electricity is being interrupted. Those smart meters are very beneficial, and will be even more important.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I gave the member from Barrie a few extra seconds to complete her remarks because of the constant interruptions that were coming from this side of the House. I would ask the members to consider that.

Further debate. I'm pleased to recognize the member for Lanark-Frontenac—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lennox and Addington.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. It is a tongue twister for so many.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 13. I guess we could call this bill "the Liberals' 36-cent solution for the people of Ontario," because that is the relief that is being proposed under Bill 13: a stay-green, outrageous burden on the treasury of 36 cents per day.

Let's put this into perspective. We know that there are 567,000 people who cannot pay their hydro bill, that they are in constant arrears of more than 30 days—567,000. Two hundred and fifty thousand—nearly 20%, or one in five—Hydro One customers cannot pay their bill on time. They're being offered 36 cents a day to help alleviate the burden—36 cents.

We also know that there are another 60,000 hydro consumers—small businesses and homeowners—who have had their electricity disconnected. They cannot and do not have lights or electricity in their homes—60,000 people. What sort of impoverished Third World country are the Liberals trying to create here in Ontario with energy poverty, where one in five can't turn on the lights? I guess they can't turn on their lights even to do

the math homework, which so many people need to do in this province as well.

1410

But I don't want to make light of this, Speaker. This is a huge and egregious tragedy that has befallen Ontario as a result of this Liberal government's electricity policies, which have been clearly outlined by the Auditor General over the years—the \$37 billion in excess, over-market rates that Ontario consumers have had to pay, the over \$10 billion in losses of having an overcapacity of supply of green energy, and we could go on—this outrageous global adjustment that people are paying.

And let's not forget this—I spoke of this last week on the throne speech, but the Liberal government wants to keep this fact hidden from the people of Ontario: Ontario is the only provincial jurisdiction that charges people a delivery rate on their electricity bill—the only province. No other province has a delivery rate. No other province has a line loss charge, but Ontario does. So when they talk about their competitive electricity rates, we can all see that it is, at best, an unctuous argument that is not being fully disclosed and revealed to people.

Speaker, why we've seen this 36-cent solution offered is the result of a small event in Scarborough—Rouge River. One event, one day—and that is the by-election loss for the Liberal Party—triggered this epiphany of the Liberal Party, that now they must do something for those hundreds of thousands of people who are in arrears on their hydro bill, for those tens of thousands of people who are struggling without electricity in their homes as we approach the fall and winter seasons. This epiphany is because of a lost election.

I know this and we all know this: The only time this government moves to help people is when the problem that people are experiencing gets transferred and becomes a problem for the Liberal Party. That's what happened in Scarborough. The people's problems were no problem—of no concern, no interest—until such time that it became a political problem in Scarborough—Rouge River. Then, they bust open the doors to find a solution. Sure enough, 36 cents a day is their solution.

I ask every member over there, do you actually think 36 cents a day is going to limit or diminish how many people are in arrears with their hydro bill? Do you actually think some of those 60,000 people who are living in the dark and the cold today will be able to afford to get electricity because it's reduced by 36 cents a day? I'd like to hear in the questions and comments, if anyone in the herd of pachyderms over there is actually listening today, how many people do they think are going to be well served by this 36-cent solution? And I think "pachyderm" is a good word to describe this because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm not so sure about that. I'd ask the member to be very cautious of his language and not be insulting.

The member has the floor.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you. Well, I don't think elephants are unparliamentary. I hope they're not unparliamentary, because we've had bills in the House by

the Liberal members, of course, protecting elephants, so—

Interjection: And elephants never forget.

Mr. Randy Hillier: And elephants never forget. But listen, we know the analogy here is that although elephants, pachyderms, are big, strong, thick-skinned animals, it doesn't take much to send them into a stampede. A little mouse can send them into a stampede, and they'll go off in all directions. That's what we've seen here. This herd of insensitive, thick-skinned animals are stampeding to prorogation, stampeding to the 36-cent solution, stampeding in all directions because they're scared. They're scared of Scarborough–Rouge River; they're scared of losing political power. And it is—

Mr. Han Dong: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Han Dong: I just want to raise a point of order. The honourable member can't attribute motive during his debate, and I think he just did.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I didn't hear him impute a motive.

The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has the floor.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. Obviously my metaphor rings true. They do get a little bit scared and testy and go off in different directions. But I want to reiterate this: 567,000 people can't pay their bills. What are we going to do? Winter is coming. Winter is approaching. And do we think 36 cents is going to help those people? Not a chance.

What are we actually going to do? Will the government commit during debate on Bill 13 that they set a target that affordable electricity means that everybody in Ontario can afford to pay their hydro? That's the commitment that I want to see from this government: a rock-solid commitment that under their watch, the people of Ontario will not be in arrears on their hydro bills and people will not have their power disconnected in the depth and cold of winter so that this government can trumpet their smog days.

We often hear this. We have to put such a financial burden on people, we have to have them living in the dark and living in the cold because there's not a smog day in Ontario. Well, I can tell you, Speaker, we're getting a smog job in here from this Liberal government. There's no shortage of smog days here in this Legislative Assembly from this Liberal government, when they justify putting people into poverty, when they justify making people live and go back to living in caves without electricity because of their commitment to the environment.

I've had enough of this smog job and I know the people of Ontario have had enough of this smog job and they're not buying it. They've been exposed. And we're going to continue to expose the facts behind their electricity policies. That is why this herd is stampeding everywhere and why their thick skin has now been penetrated by a loss in Scarborough–Rouge River.

1420

There will be more losses, Speaker. There will be more losses. And who knows? They may come up with another two-cent solution next week to go onto their 36-cent solution. But it's not enough. It's not enough. And it won't be enough until they make a commitment that people in Ontario will be able to afford their electricity once again. This one in five people in rural Ontario who can't pay their bill is a travesty. It is a travesty, Speaker.

I've put the facts up on my website. Ontario is the most expensive province in the country when it comes to the total costs of the electricity bill. That is a fact.

In Manitoba, the basic monthly charge for hydro is \$7.57. If you used 1,000 kilowatts of power in Manitoba, your total cost would be \$81.38.

Interjection: How much in Ontario?

Mr. Randy Hillier: In Ontario, first you have the monthly basic charge of \$24.07. Then you have a regulatory charge of \$6.71. Then you have a delivery charge of \$82.66.

That same home in Manitoba that pays \$81.38 for using electricity of 1,000 kilowatts—that same home, pick it up and move it to Lanark county or to Manitoulin Island—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Nickel Belt.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Nickel Belt.

It's \$239. 23. It's \$81 in our province next door of Manitoba; \$239 here.

Even in that electricity powerhouse of PEI, where they have no hydroelectricity power, where they have no nuclear power: In PEI, that same house would be \$162.52. It's \$239 here.

Saskatchewan, another powerhouse of hydroelectricity development—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: No, they don't have it; no nuclear. Very few windmills and solar panels as well, to tell you the truth.

That same house, picked up from Lanark county or Nickel Belt and moved to Saskatchewan, would see a cost of \$155.43 instead of \$239.

Is there any wonder that we have one in five people in arrears?

Put this into perspective. Can you imagine what would happen to any other corporate interest—Visa, MasterCard, Sears, Walmart—if they had a default ratio of 20% on their loans or their receivables? They would be insolvent, and rightly so. But Ontario Hydro: This is a crown corporation run by a herd of pachyderms, and 20% default is—“We'll just disconnect them afterwards.”

Let's remember: Unlike the banks, even, or Visa or MasterCard—one of the reasons they have to be competitive on their prices and whatnot is because they're in a competitive marketplace. Hydro One: Are they in a competitive marketplace? No. They're a sole and exclusive provider of electricity in rural Ontario. They are a monopoly, and they act like any monopoly: insensitive, uncaring, thick-skinned.

When we explained to the Ombudsman the terrible numbers of people who were coming to our constituency offices with erroneous bills, with outrageous errors in their bills, what do you think the Ombudsman—he referred to Hydro One as like catching a greased and slippery pig, I think is the terminology the Ombudsman used. Well, I could use the same metaphor for the Liberal government in their electricity policies. How do you catch them? They're like a greasy pig. They have all these—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Once again, I ask the member not to use insulting language. It's not adding to the debate. I appreciate his remarks, but please not continuing with the insulting comments. The member has the floor.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I will, Speaker. Thank you for the reminder. The comments from the Ombudsman just—the parallel was striking to me.

I do want to ask the members opposite: Are you going to bring this up in your caucus? Are you going to raise it up? Will there be a desire, will there be an interest by representatives in this House, that they expect the people in Ontario to be able to afford their hydro bills as well, and will there be a commitment that this government will endeavour and find ways to ensure affordability for their hydro bills?

I would like to see a commitment from those who engage in questions and comments saying, yes, we're going to be requesting and demanding that your government brings in affordability as a priority, brings in that priority of affordability, that we're not going to allow the people of Ontario to suffer through a winter without electricity. I think that's a fair priority, a fair commitment for this Liberal government to demonstrate to this House that—and instead of 36 cents, how about taking off the delivery charge? How about taking off the line loss charge? How about doing something real, something demonstrative, something that will alleviate the harm that you've hurt the people of rural Ontario with? That's what we want to see. That's what my constituents want to see, not sheer terror when they get the hydro bill every month.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would say the situation in Nickel Belt is pretty much similar to what he just described. I will give you examples:

Mrs. Carmen Spadafore is from Chelmsford in my riding. She has come to see us, and she said they are an elderly couple on a fixed income and they find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. The cost of hydro has more than doubled—almost tripled.

Richard Miklos is a small business owner in Alban in the south end of my riding. He talks about how hydro prices are hurting small business and killing jobs. There aren't that many jobs in Alban that we can afford to kill too many of them.

Mr. Ed Bradley brought in his bill and showed us that there was \$26 worth of electricity, but there was \$100 worth of delivery charges, and altogether his bill was over \$150.

Marcel Quesnel wrote to my office, "As a customer, I am willing to pay for the hydro that I use, but not all those added charges that double my hydro bill. I am 75 years old, living on my CPP and old age security and my wife's old age security." His hydro bill, the one that he brought us, was \$509.44, more than his wife's pension cheque.

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I could keep on going: I have Don and Rhea Rouleau from Hanmer in the exact same situation. I have Art and Louise Peach, who wrote a letter: "We write to you"—I see that I won't have enough time, but I can go on, Speaker. I have people coming to my office because they can't make ends meet non-stop. This has to change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: It's a pleasure to rise in this House today and give a response to the member opposite, actually. I would say, after hearing some, I would say, very inappropriate comments, from my perspective, that I don't feel like I will sink to his level. But one thing that I want to say is that the people that he represents—to make sure that when I hear comments regarding the struggles that some of our families are experiencing—as a former social worker, that comes to get me, because there are programs that exist. Most of the time that I spoke to these rural communities, it's interesting that they don't know about some of our programs. So I'll just share, just in case. I only have two minutes, Mr. Speaker.

As of January 1, we did remove the debt retirement charge two years earlier than we planned, saving an average family about \$65 per year on their hydro bills. One other thing that we've done—and I hope the member speaks and refers these people and helps them apply to the Ontario Electricity Support Program for low- and modest-income families, saving an average family \$430 a year when combined with the removal of the debt retirement charge.

I'm quite pleased that our government has modernized an electricity system that needed to be fixed, to ensure that Ontarians have power they need when they need it. We took the dirty system and made it clean by completely eliminating dirty coal-fired generation, meaning Ontario will have a cleaner future. Again, for the members of this constituency: We're increasing protection, actually. That's why the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act for rural and remote consumers is resulting in a net benefit to these households of about 20%—about \$540 on average.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are some issues. We are listening to people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I am pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington on Bill 13. I thought he made a really good point at the beginning of his speech talking about the fact that there are 567,000

people in arrears by more than 30 days. I mean, that is just huge. It just speaks to the fact, the reason why we're getting so many calls, emails, concerns about the affordability of electricity in this province.

There's a lot of spin coming from the government, so I go to the Auditor General to get as close to the factual information as you can get on the issue. It's pretty bad, when you read the Auditor General's report. The government talks about how they have improved reliability: That's what they spent all the money on, and that's why electricity bills are so high.

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: I think the member from St. Catharines just said that's true. Well, the auditor says, "We noted, for example, that in the five years from 2010 to 2014, transmission system outages have been lasting 30% longer and occurring 24% more often.... Hydro One's distribution system has consistently been one of the least reliable among large Canadian electricity distributors between 2010 and 2014." So if you're spending money on this, it obviously isn't working, based on what the auditor is saying.

You wonder why your electricity bill is so high. The numbers in here are staggering. She goes on: "In particular, global adjustment fees, which are the excess payments to generators over the market price, amounted to \$37 billion from 2006 to 2014, and these payments are projected to cost electricity consumers another \$133 billion from 2015 to 2032." And you wonder why everyone is paying so much for their electricity bill in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to again make comments on Bill 13 in response to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. I appreciated his clear and concise way of putting the situation—it's a 36-cent solution—but also his reminding us of some of the numbers. We don't generally hear numbers from the government benches, but 60,000 consumers today have had their electricity disconnected. That's awful—and that's to date; that's to this point. So imagine what's coming. About 20% or one fifth of Hydro One customers cannot pay their bill on time.

In Oshawa we have Oshawa PUC, and our rates are actually lower than others in the province. We have a different situation. I decided to collect hydro bills from people across my riding because I was curious to see how they would compare. We hear horrible numbers from our rural and remote communities, and I wanted to see what we were faced with in our community. They also are unbelievably high. They are insurmountable challenges for families.

As the member said, this is an egregious tragedy; it is. We live in a rich and prosperous land of plenty here in Ontario, with flowing rivers and wind and sun. It's a bountiful place. To imagine that we have a government that has not been able to manage those resources to the point where we can benefit from that bounty—and we are

standing here talking about people who will be living in the dark, who will be potentially living in the cold, and that that is somehow okay, that we're talking about dollars and cents and these wonderful programs that the government is—the member said "trumpeting"—they're talking about these programs to help people, but they've put them in this boat in the first place.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington can now reply.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Ottawa-Orléans, Parry Sound and Oshawa for their comments.

Let me address the member from Ottawa-Orléans first. With all those programs to alleviate the harm, to alleviate the injury—and she rattled off a bunch of them—that doesn't alter the fact that 567,000 people still can't pay their bills with all your programs, and 60,000 people can't have any power whatsoever in spite of all the programs. Your programs fail. Your electricity policies fail. The people of Ontario have a failed government and a failed electricity policy, and they are being harmed and injured by it.

I said that this is exposed; we're exposing it with facts. This whole hydroelectricity scam is exposed with facts. The jig is up. The people in Scarborough-Rouge River know it's up. The people in every riding across this province know the jig is up. There's no more time for jiggery-pokery and poppycock on this hydro file. It's time for facts. Facts will rule the day, and this stampede of elephants will be gone in due course, I hope.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am happy to rise today in this House on behalf of the people I represent in London West to speak to Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act.

Like many of us in this House, I had the opportunity over the weekend to talk to a number of constituents in my riding about a variety of issues, but I wanted to share with members today three conversations in particular that I had over the weekend.

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The first conversation was with a constituent I met at the ALS walk. He came up to me. He said, "Peggy, what can you do about the Liberals' bait-and-switch with our hydro bills?" This is someone who works as a credit counsellor with many low-income people in my riding. He deals on a daily basis with people who are behind on their hydro bills, who are struggling to make ends meet, who are daily confronted by this heat-or-eat choice that so many Ontarians have to make and that we've heard so much about. That really is a crisis in this province, despite the Minister of Energy's refusal to acknowledge it as such.

This constituent told me about the growing number of clients who are bringing in their hydro bills to show him,

to get some guidance, some advice, some assistance on what they can do to manage their income and their expenses. They end up going straight from his office to the food bank because they can't afford to buy groceries after they have paid their hydro bills. This is a person who deals with a number of individuals who live in social housing. They are on Ontario Works or on ODSP.

In my community—and, I'm sure, in many communities across this province—many of these social housing developments are aging. They were built several decades ago. Many of them are heated with electric baseboard heaters. People who live in these units have very, very limited ability to reduce their usage. They can't afford retrofits; they have no capacity to bring in new conservation measures. They are at the mercy of these hydro bills because of their electric heating.

This weekend I also met with the local coordinator of London's Keep Hydro Public campaign. This, as many members know, is a non-partisan campaign focused on halting the privatization of Hydro One. This local coordinator told me that the Keep Hydro Public lawn signs we have seen popping up across the province—they're flying off the shelves in London. There are more requests than they can possibly keep up with. They've got dozens of calls coming in on a daily basis. When they've been out canvassing door-to-door asking if people want these lawn signs, she told me that at least 90% of the people that they talk to say, "Yes, put up a sign." For the ones who don't want a sign, it's because of landscaping or something else. They've even got a car screeching to a halt on the street saying, "Can you please deliver one of those signs? I want to put one of those signs on my lawn."

We had Western Fair in my community a couple of weeks ago. Keep Hydro Public had a booth at Western Fair. They collected over 700 signatures in just a few days. Every single person who stopped by the booth wanted to sign the petition. She mentioned that this was a bit of a change from last year. Last year, people were asking questions about asking what this was about. This year everybody knows what it's about, and they want to do something to try to stop the privatization of Hydro One.

The Keep Hydro Public campaign also had a booth at AMO in August. Many members attended that conference. She told me that there was huge support from mayors and from counsellors across the province who stopped by the Keep Hydro Public booth and expressed their support for that initiative.

I was talking to a city of London councillor recently who told me the same thing. She said that she went to AMO. Everybody she talked to at AMO was raising concerns about hydro privatization and how the sell-off will affect hydro rates and how it will affect the ability of municipalities to do local economic development. The cost of hydro, as we know from the chamber of commerce, is a huge barrier to business growth and development, and it has a real impact on the health of local economies.

The third conversation I had this weekend was with a senior. This is a retiree who lives on a fixed income and who had taken a much-anticipated trip to Scotland over the summer. He was away for four weeks on vacation, came back and opened up a hydro bill that was the highest bill he had ever received in all of his years living in London. He had used no air conditioning. He had never once opened or closed the fridge. He had never once turned the lights on or off. He had not been watching TV. He had not been using the computer. Basically the only electricity that was used was what was needed to keep his appliances plugged in.

Speaker, I'm sharing these conversations because they shed real light on the complete inadequacy of the solution to out-of-control hydro rates that is before us today in this bill. This is a bill that was introduced as part of the Liberal government's elaborate attempt to change the channel, to better position themselves for the next election and to look after their own interests rather than the interests of the people of Ontario. It was one of the first pieces of legislation introduced following the prorogation of the Legislature in September. It was part of the "great reset" that started with the new speech from the throne, which had as its centrepiece the bill which we are debating today.

This bill promises to rebate the provincial portion of the HST on hydro bills in Ontario to respond to Ontarians' concerns about rising prices. I do want to say that New Democrats have no problem with removing the provincial portion of the HST from hydro bills. In fact, we have been calling for that for at least six years, since the HST was first applied to hydro, because at the time we argued that hydro should be exempt from the HST. The 8% that the Liberals are so generously proposing to remove should never have been added in the first place.

Electricity is an essential service. It should be exempt from sales tax, just like all other essentials. All Ontarians, regardless of where they live in this province, rely on electricity to heat and light their homes, to run their refrigerators to store their food safely, to cook and to clean. They need hydro for basic communications. We know that there are Ontarians with medical needs—for example, dialysis machines—who need hydro to run those machines that keep them alive. The list goes on and on.

An exemption should have been made for hydro to be removed from the HST at the very beginning—which, of course, is what we were pushing for at the time—but the Liberals, in their wisdom, refused to exempt electricity from the sales tax. With this bill, they are still refusing to exempt electricity, and are instead offering an 8% rebate.

Some may ask: "What's the difference between a rebate and an exemption if the bottom line to consumers is the same?" The big difference is that a rebate can be eliminated at any time. We know this because of our experience with the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, which was a 10% reduction in hydro bills that was in place from 2011 to 2015, which was then removed.

It's interesting that when this 8% rebate was first announced, the finance minister refused at the time to say

whether and when it would end. We've since heard the Premier say that it will remain in place, but it's impossible for us to know whether this is just a strategy to help the Liberals through the next election or if it really is a commitment from the government.

We have experiences that would suggest that it might just be a strategy. We saw this when the gas plants were cancelled, which in many ways led to my election in the by-election in 2013. This was a \$1-billion seat-saver strategy to help the Liberals win GTA ridings in the 2011 provincial election. The clean energy benefit was a two-election strategy that helped the Liberals out in 2011 and then again in 2014. This seems to be the *modus operandi* of this Liberal government: They use taxpayer dollars to shore up support in advance of an election and hope that people don't see through the strategy.

The other big difference between a rebate and an exemption is that people can see a rebate on their bills, compliments of the government of Ontario, just like they saw the 10% clean energy benefit that was previously in place.

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This time, however, I'm not sure how appreciative the people of Ontario are going to be. Instead of the 10% reduction that was in place until 2015, there will now be an 8% reduction. Instead of simply exempting hydro from the provincial portion of the HST, a cumbersome bureaucratic process is going to be required to rebate the amount of tax paid so that hydro customers can know how generous this Liberal government is.

The government has claimed that the reason they're taking this approach is that an exemption would take too long and that it would require complicated negotiations with the federal government, but there is no reason why this 8% reduction couldn't be implemented as a rebate initially until the permanent exemption is in place. One has to think that the federal Liberals would be very willing to help fast-track the negotiations that would be required, given the help that they received from the Premier in the last election.

I also find it ironic that at the same time the Liberals are touting the transparency of the rebate on their electricity bills, they have no problem whatsoever with the OEB burying cap-and-trade revenues in the delivery charges on people's gas bills. But for my constituents in London West, the most insulting thing about the rebates that we are talking about today is that the only reason we're debating this bill is because the Liberals lost a by-election in Scarborough–Rouge River.

People in my riding, people in southwestern Ontario, and people in many regions of this province often feel that policy decisions that are made by this government do not take into account regional perspectives. They are made with a GTA lens that doesn't reflect the needs of other areas of the province. The fact that the results of this by-election in Scarborough–Rouge River triggered an "aha" moment for this Liberal government is astonishing to my constituents. We have been raising concerns about this issue since long before I was elected

in 2013, and in fact it has become increasingly urgent since that time.

I want to read to you some of the emails I've been receiving on this issue. This is from two years ago: "I am writing today in regard to the increasing hydro rates and the recent rate hike. As a single person living alone, it has become increasingly harder to pay the monthly expenses and having a hydro bill that has doubled in the past five years hasn't helped."

Here's one from more than a year and a half ago: "I am absolutely outraged at the insane hydro rates I am paying. I live in a small house in Oakridge. Last month my hydro bill was \$497. This month it is \$512. This is destroying me financially."

Or here's one from April, 2015, more than a year and a half ago: "I feel like I can't breathe. I'm disabled and live on a fixed income. I struggle to pay my bills. Hydro is going up again in May. I'm overwhelmed. I'm scared that I can't afford to live in my apartment anymore because hydro is so high already. What do I do? Why is this happening? Please, is there something you can do to help" me "and others like me? Does Wynne even care about us and the working poor?"

Or here's another one, almost a year ago: "I am concerned with the ever-increasing costs of hydro. I am middle-class. I live in a single-family house and my hydro bill is ever increasing. It has increased \$150 to \$200 a month in the last five years with little to no increase in consumption."

So, Speaker, that this is suddenly news to this Liberal government, as I said before, is shocking to me and my constituents in London West. In August, like everybody else in this House, we learned from the Ontario Energy Board that there are 12,400 Londoners who were behind on their hydro bills in 2015, an increase of over 1,000 families since 2013. London Hydro had to write off \$692,000 in 2015 because they have given up trying to collect those monies owed. People simply don't have the resources to pay their bills. And I know we've all dealt with casework from constituents whose hydro has been cut off because they simply can't afford to pay.

As we know, Ontario has the highest average electricity rates not just in Canada but across North America, with some minor exceptions. But basically, Ontario is leading the way. This has made energy poverty a very real and frightening prospect for people who live in my community of London West and also for people across the province.

We read stories in the media on a regular basis. There was a family in Moosonee who said they had cut down on entertainment and groceries, reduced buying fruits and vegetables, unplugged all of their appliances and used the BBQ for cooking. The only reason they were able to light their house is because their adult son was paying them rent. Yet these people, despite all of these measures they had taken, were unable to afford their hydro bills.

Speaker, vulnerable households in this province are those who pay about 30% of their income on energy. We know that many of these are renters, who make up 28% of Ontario households overall but almost half of all

energy-vulnerable households. What this government is proposing to do with this 8% rebate is a drop in the bucket for these energy-vulnerable consumers across this province.

In the very few minutes I have left I wanted to reiterate some of the points that were made by my colleague the member for Toronto—Danforth when he made his lead-off speech in the House. He talked about the reason that this bill is so inadequate: It does not address the three big factors that have contributed to skyrocketing hydro rates in this province. Those are privatization, which he estimates has added about \$750 million to \$1 billion a year to people's hydro bills; the second factor is the oversupply of power, which the IESO says has contributed to about a 30% increase in electricity costs over the last decade; the third is the drop in demand which, again, the IESO says has contributed to about a 40% increase in people's hydro bills over the last decade.

These are the real factors that have led to the crisis that we have before us in this province today. Yet there is nothing in this bill to address these factors.

In London, we have a historic and very proud relationship with Adam Beck, the father of the electricity system in this province and a former mayor of London, highly revered in my community and across this province.

One of the quotes that I'd like to share from Adam Beck has real relevance for what we're talking about today. He said: "It is the duty of the government to see that development is not hindered by permitting a handful of people to enrich themselves out of these treasures"—meaning hydroelectricity generation—"at the expense of the general public." That is what Sir Adam Beck told us so many years ago, and it remains true today.

Instead of this government fulfilling its duty, which Adam Beck had pointed out, preventing the further privatization of our electricity system that was begun by the PCs and has been entrenched by the Liberals—instead of taking those meaningful actions that would really do something about rising hydro rates, like halting the privatization of Hydro One, we see this drop in the bucket with the bill before us today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I say to the member to London West, I don't think you should minimize the impact of the actions we're taking under this legislation to reduce energy costs for all Ontarians. I think it's really important.

Ultimately, this begins with the truth that our government modernized an electricity system that needed to be fixed to make sure that Ontarians have the power that they need when they need it. I don't think anybody would argue that those changes needed to take place. We took a very dirty system and made it clean by eliminating coal-fired generation. That was another crucial thing that I believe the opposition supported.

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The actions that we're taking under Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act, are important

as well. Rebating Ontario's portion of the HST for families and small business is a savings of 8%—\$130 annually for the average household. That's being done through legislation. That's still significant and important.

Increasing protection for rural and remote customers for those people who are eligible, particularly those in low-density areas: This is really important and will result in a benefit for those households of up to 20% of the total cost, or \$540 on average.

One of the pieces that I think hasn't been probably spoken about nearly enough is expanding the Industrial conservation initiative by lowering the level at which they qualify in making medium, small and large businesses eligible for savings of as much as 33% or 34% of their bill. That's really significant as well.

I'm sure you don't mean to minimize the impact of these changes and the actions that are taken. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that is listening to constituents, listening to our constituents and making a difference in terms of the affordability of electricity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going to go back a little bit to the former speaker for the Liberals because there were a few points there that I just want to make sure we put on the record. He talked about the spin and he talked about rhetoric. I want to suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the facts I'm going to bring are actually from the Auditor General's annual report of 2015. The Auditor General at that point suggested that our gas plants cost us \$1.2 billion for energy that we didn't get. He talked about global adjustments from 2006 to 2014 being \$37 billion. From 2015 to 2032, an additional \$133 billion will be spent on global adjustments. Those numbers are of a magnitude that most people can't even comprehend how much money that is, but that's taking away from our hospitals, it's taking away from our school system and it's taking from the most vulnerable people who need all of our social services in our communities.

Renewables: We've overpaid, by his facts, \$9.2 billion on these contracts for energy that we do not need. They want to continue to talk about all of this—they inherited a system that was unreliable. Again, according to the Auditor General, outages are 30% longer since they've taken power. From 2012 to 2015, they happened 24% more often. He states that they're the least reliable of all the large Canadian distributors from 2010 to 2014, and there has been an increase of 275% in outages from 2012 to 2015. Sixty thousand people in our province have no power in spite of all these programs that they purport and use as their speaking notes to say that Ontarians have access.

Mr. Speaker, let's not treat the taxpayers of Ontario as fools. It is their money they're recycling back into them to try to win favour. That's \$1 billion that's not going to be there for our hospitals, our schools and our less fortunate people across our province.

I think the member from London West said it well: People are seeing through this. It's trying to buy their

favour with their own money. The people of Ontario are tired of it, and we'll continue to fight for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have the honour to speak after my colleague and the wonderful debate that she has put on the floor today in bringing real-life stories to the table so that hopefully the members across the aisle will listen to how families are feeling when it comes to this impact of hydro rates on their lives. She said some very compelling stories of women who, a year ago, were begging for help with the cost of hydro. A year later, we know that costs have risen that much more and how those same families are facing that bill and that impact on their lives.

On Hamilton Mountain, I've listened to my constituents. I'm meeting them on a regular basis. I'm talking to them on the phone and touching base with them through social media, and they're in fear of how they're going to continue to pay these bills.

You have an 80-plus-year-old gentleman come into your office who's taking care of his 80-plus-year-old wife as well as their grown adult son who is dependent on them, and he's sobbing to me about the fact his bills have gone from \$400 to over \$700—he's on a pre-authorized payment—and how is it possible that his family is going to be able to afford those bills. They are real impacts.

To hear the Liberals and the government on the other side talk about us minimizing the programs that they're putting forward, which are based on their own mistakes that they have made on the energy file that have created this mess in the first place—and now they want to give back \$140 a year on bills that are over \$1,000 a month. It just doesn't make sense.

If you think we are minimizing it, Minister, we absolutely are because your government has made an absolute mess of this file.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, from the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Inadvertently, I think I was referring in my comments to the Auditor General as a "he." Obviously, it's Bonnie Lysyk, a very well-respected and regarded person. I just got caught up, saying "he" instead of "she." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Members can correct their own record.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It is an honour to rise today in support of Bill 13. I'm very pleased to be here to add my comments to the discussion today.

The one thing that I do want to reiterate in the chamber today is that, on the weekend, I had an opportunity to chat with many constituents. One in particular, Henk Wevers, came to me and said, "You know, look at the sky." And I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "No, but seriously, look at the sky. It's beautiful. It's blue. We don't have any more brown-out days."

That's something that I think we need to never lose sight of. It is extremely important to understand that we took a dirty system and we made it clean by completely eliminating dirty, coal-fired generation plants, meaning that Ontario would have a cleaner future; meaning that we would have less in health care costs; meaning that, for example, my own brother will have less days when he is struggling for breath because he has asthma.

It's extremely important that we remember that, through legislation, we'll be rebating Ontario's portion of the HST for families, a savings of 8%, or \$130, annually. Through regulation, we will be increasing protection for rural and remote customers, resulting in a net benefit for those households of up to 20%, or \$540 on average; and, through regulation, expanding the industrial conservation initiative for eligible medium and large businesses up to a third of their bills. It is important not to lose track of these very important details.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. I will go back to the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to acknowledge the comments that were offered by members in the House: the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the member from Hamilton Mountain, of course, and the member for Kingston and the Islands. I appreciate the comments that were offered.

I am glad that the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound raised the global adjustment issue because, of course, the global adjustment fee basically represents the difference between what the private power generators get on their contracts and the price that the market will pay.

The reason those global adjustments fees have shot up so high and the rest of us are left paying the bill is because the Conservatives started the privatization of the power system and the Liberals entrenched it by ensuring that all new power generation in the province is held in private hands. That means that whatever is happening in the market, we are left paying that contractual price to the private power generators, and it is costing Ontarians enormously.

The government likes to say that they're making a profit because there is \$2 billion in surplus power produced because of these private contracts. They're selling it for \$500 million. Speaker, I don't know how many people in this province would say that 25 cents on the dollar represents a profit. I don't think that people in my riding would say that, and I don't think there are too many people across this province who would say that either.

1510

We have before us today an initiative, an 8% rebate. Yes, 36 cents a day is going to be helpful. But no, it is not going to deal with the real issues that confront us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased this afternoon to have 20 minutes on the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Con-

sumers Act, Bill 13. I think that as I start, it's important for me to underline and underscore exactly what it is that we're announcing and debating. I understand that the opposition parties will continue to do their best to minimize exactly what this announcement represents for all Ontarians, and even more for some Ontarians. I'm going to get to that, I think, right off the top.

Number one, I want people to know that we will be removing on January 1, 2017—assuming the legislation is able to be passed—8%, or the PST portion of the HST, off of everybody's electricity bills in the province of Ontario. I understand the effort to minimize this, but that represents approximately on average \$130 for everyone in the province of Ontario that is paying their hydro bill. That is not an insignificant amount.

In fact, I would say, Speaker, before I go on to the second component of the announcement, that in the years in this chamber that we have been debating energy and energy pricing in the province of Ontario, I don't think I have heard another idea come forward from the third party, the NDP. In fact, I think the NDP had this piece in their platform document. If not in 2011, then they did have it in 2014. If it wasn't in the first election that I just referenced, it was certainly in the second, so at least once they have had this in a platform document. Yet somehow today they find themselves in the position of having to argue against a piece that they felt was important enough to contain in a platform document.

So, number one, Speaker, that's been done: Effective January 1, assuming the legislation passes—and hopefully it will pass—we'll be in a position of removing \$130 on average from everybody's electricity bill.

The second part of this is a piece that I think is important and worth noting: If you're a Hydro One customer in the province of Ontario and you live in a low-density area—and you can find that right on your bill. If you find your Hydro One bill, on page 2, it will tell you if you're in a low-density area. If you're not seasonal or under any other restriction, most of those folks in Hydro One low density will receive an additional 12% off of their bill, in addition to the 8% from the PST portion of the HST. The total of 20%, as explained to me, will average out to approximately \$540 every year for people in the province of Ontario. That is not an insignificant amount of money.

As I said a couple of times already, I understand it's the role of the opposition to argue and critique these particular policy pieces. But I would say this goes farther than anything I've heard either party over the last two or three years represent or suggest they might implement, should they have had the opportunity. So this is a very, very significant move on our part: \$540.

What's important to also mention is that I know that the Minister of Energy, when he brought this forward—I believe he asked for unanimous consent. What that would mean, to people who are following this on television, is that had unanimous consent been granted, that would have ensured our ability to move this forward by January 1, 2017. But, for some reason, the opposition parties—

I'm not sure if one or both—did not agree to unanimous consent on this legislation. And so, now our work will continue to ensure we are able to move forward with this policy, should the legislation pass by January 1, 2017.

Speaker, another part—and I do want to thank former Minister Chiarelli, as well as current Minister Thibeault, for this piece—is the low-density piece. The rural part of the ridings is a part that I have been very focused on over the last number of months and have advocated on. I want to thank both of them for their work on the file.

The other thing I would like to reference before getting into some other remarks is that there has been a suggestion made that the only reason we are moving forward on this file is because of the results of the recent election in Scarborough—I forget the particular name of the riding.

Interjections: Rouge River.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Scarborough—Rouge River. Of course, Speaker, that's ridiculous. It's just absolutely patently ridiculous. This policy has been in the works for some time. I'm proud of the policy. We've been working on this for a particular period of time.

I want to, just for a minute, if I can, talk a little bit about the cost drivers associated with the cost of electricity. I know that this has not yet, as far as I'm aware, been part of the conversation to this point.

I had an event on this in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan just this past Saturday in Kakabeka Falls at the Legion. Kakabeka Falls is in the city of Oliver Paipoonge, which is in my riding. We had a pretty nice turnout. I spoke to them about some of the cost drivers in the electricity price in the province of Ontario today. When I went through my remarks, I simply said, "As you are seized with this issue and as opposition members continue to talk about it, ask them how they may have avoided some of the cost increase, if not all of the cost increase, that has occurred since we came into government in 2003."

One of the pieces that I reminded them about—one gentleman and I had a fun little conversation: He said, "Well, you guys wanted to get rid of coal." I said, "Yes, we did, but all three parties—the Conservatives, when Ernie Eves was the leader, and the NDP, when Howard Hampton was the leader in 2003—all of them agreed in the 2003 election that they would close coal as well." So I said to the people who were at my meeting in Kakabeka Falls that, if they were going to fulfill their campaign promise in 2003, should they have won the election, either they had to make the commitment and close coal or they would have just ignored the commitment in their platform. The point of course was, let's work on the assumption that they were going to close coal.

Coal, in 2003, was about 5,000 or 6,000 megawatts of energy in the province of Ontario. It was about 20% or 25% of the total generated capacity of energy in the province of Ontario. So if you were going to close it, which both parties—not just the Liberals; the NDP, under Howard Hampton, and the Conservatives, under Ernie Eves, made the same commitment. So if you were going

to close coal, 20% of our generated capacity, how were you going to replace that energy? Of course, the answer is that, no matter how you would have replaced it, it would have cost a lot of money to replace 20% of the total generated energy capacity in the province of Ontario. So I say to my friends in the riding—and I say this to them all the time. If they want to be critical of the price, you have to ask them how they would have done that and how much it would have cost. That's point 1, Speaker.

Point 2, which I like to remind them about as well, is that when we came into government in 2003, there was an artificial cap on the price of electricity. People, in their rate base on their bill, were not paying the true cost of the power. I think the Speaker will remember this; he was in government at the time. The cost on the bill—whatever it was showing up on your rate, the price per kilowatt hour—wasn't the real cost of energy in the province of Ontario.

I'm not sure why the party or the government of the day made a decision to put the cap in place; they may have felt it was the appropriate thing to do and supported in other ways. But the point I say to my friends in my riding and that I mentioned at my meeting in Kakabeka Falls the other day was that that also represented about 20% of the cost at the time, 15% or 20%; I forget what the amount was. That's another significant driver in the cost because, if you remove the cap, you're no longer paying it out of the tax pocket; now you're paying it out of your rate pocket, which shows up on your bill.

So we've got the coal piece, which represents 6,000 or 5,000 megawatts of energy; we've got a cap piece that has to be replaced. Somebody has to do it somehow.

One of the other criticisms that we'll hear often and that the opposition parties will use is about the Green Energy Act and the cost associated with bringing wind and solar on. Fair enough. That's their position. I don't know if it means that they support it or don't support it. But when they talk about green energy, they only focus on the wind and solar. They don't talk about—and somebody mentioned it in their remarks earlier. I can't recall who it was—I apologize—but somebody talked about hydro and the need to bring more water power into the province of Ontario in terms of its total mix. Someone was referencing Sir Adam Beck and the mayor of London, so maybe it was the member from London.

The truth is, we've done that; we've done it in a large way. But when people talk about green energy, they're not talking about water power. They're not talking about the fact that we've brought significant water power energy into the mix. They're only talking about the wind and solar because that's what they want to criticize.

Beck III: We worked on that project for I don't know how long, and when it was concluded, it cost about \$1 billion. It represents about 1,000 additional megawatts of water power energy in the province of Ontario. So we have been doing that. One thousand megawatts: That's a lot of juice. That project finished some time ago, I believe.

1520

Another one, in northeastern Ontario, if there is anybody—I see at least one member here who will be familiar with the Lower Mattagami project. Hundreds of tradespeople from Thunder Bay, in my riding—carpenters from the carpenters' union, electricians, all sorts of workers were at that Lower Mattagami project for years. It was a long project. The Lower Mattagami project, Speaker, represents about 450 megawatts of water power energy in the province of Ontario. So with Beck and with the Lower Mattagami, you're at 1,400 or 1,500 additional megawatts of water power energy. It's not the only new water power that's come on stream since we formed government, but there are two huge, huge water power projects.

People want to just criticize the Green Energy Act. They want the people in the ridings to just hear about solar and wind, but they don't talk about that piece at all. So we have brought on significant energy. They want to criticize the Green Energy Act and the cost drivers that it represents when it comes to the price on their hydro bill. Speaker, the truth of it is that the total procurement on the green energy side, including the water power that I have just described, does not represent a significant component of the price increase since we came to government in 2003. It simply does not.

Others have spoken in the chamber already about the investments. They can talk about whether the system is more reliable today than it was in 2003. I don't know anybody who has bona fides on this particular file who would say that it's not more reliable today than it was in 2003. I believe, absolutely, most people would agree. Don't talk to us about it; go outside and talk to the people that know. They will tell you that it's a more reliable system than it was 10 and 13 years ago, and that, of course, comes with a cost. We have invested significantly.

The investments in the infrastructure, the artificial cap, the coal replacement policy—I ask my friends, when they want to criticize it, what would you have done about those three component pieces of the electricity system in the province of Ontario? How would you have avoided those costs? They wouldn't have. They wouldn't have, Speaker, unless they were just going to leave the system to decay even further than it was when we came to government in 2003.

I want to talk about delivery charges briefly. I hear the criticism of that from the opposition members as well. You will remember when that first started to show up in the hydro bill. It was in the late 1990s when the government of the day broke up what was then called Ontario Hydro into four or five different component pieces, different business units, if you will. One of them became Hydro One, another one was OPG, and there were two or three other business lines created through the breakup. It was at that point that for the first time—I believe for the first time—on your hydro bill, you saw the delivery charge broken out. It was always there, but for the first time it was broken out.

People will see that, and they get frustrated by it. I argue to them, well, here's the history; here's why it is there now. But when you turn on the tap in your house and the water comes out of the tap, do you just pay for the water on your city water bill? I ask my friends in Thunder Bay: Do you just pay for the water that comes out of the tap, or do you pay for the pipes in the ground? Do you pay for the pumping station to get it through the pipes? Do you pay for the treatment plant—and our example in Thunder Bay, the Bare Point treatment centre, state-of-the-art, \$50 million eight or 10 years ago, beautiful facility? The point is, it costs money. The pumping stations, the treatment plant, the pipes and everything that goes into delivering the water that comes out of your tap when you turn the tap on, you have to pay for it all.

It's the same with your energy system. We have to pay for the poles, we have to pay for the wires, we have to pay for everything that goes into the system as well as the generation, and it's not a cheap system. It's not a cheap system.

So, Speaker, I remind people of that when they wonder about the delivery charge. That's the history. That's where it came from and that's why it's there. It's part of the component costs of getting the energy to you on time, when you need it, and you can count on it.

I want to talk a little bit—I'm down to about six or seven minutes here. I want to talk a little bit, if I can, just about municipal affordability and people that are even living in the unorganized parts of our province. Many of us came to government or ran for the first time—including me—in 2003, and we came here with some municipal council experience. I spent six years on Thunder Bay city council, from 1997 to 2003. No disrespect to the Speaker, but I remember the relationship that existed between the government of the day and municipal councils. I would say by and large, right across the province of Ontario, it was not a good relationship. I would say that one of the most egregious pieces of the damaging of the relationship between the government of the day and municipal councils was the downloading exercise that went on in a very significant way. Anybody who served on municipal councils during that time will know that.

We stand here on this side of the aisle now and we listen to the criticisms that come from opposition parties—specifically, I would say, in this example, the official opposition—and they want to frame the context—they ran an election on this already and they're going to run another one in 2018, I guess—for people in municipalities, ratepayers and taxpayers across the province of Ontario that, “Under this government, your life has become way more unaffordable”—that's why they're using the hydro example—“than it was when we were in government.”

Speaker, I know this is easy for you; you were there for a long time, and some of your members as well. But, my goodness, the downloading exercise that went on in the late 1990s and the early 2000s—I can't say this with absolute certainty but I'm going to say it with almost absolute certainty—might represent the biggest tax

increase on a property taxpayer's bill in the history of the province of Ontario. You can call it a tax increase, you can call it a tax shift or you can call it downloading, but small rural northern municipalities all across this province became responsible for miles of bridges. They became responsible for miles of roadway.

I was in Kingston not that long ago, and my friend the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs was there. We both had an opportunity to speak at the conference. I believe—again, I'm going from memory here—that the Minister of Agriculture said that, in his area or in north or eastern Ontario—I can't remember the geographic description that he used—something like 43% of the roads and bridges were downloaded to the municipalities in that area. They became responsible for the costs of maintaining those roads. They became responsible for all of the bridges as well as everything else that went on.

So I tell people in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan and my constituents in Gillies and O'Connor and Conmee, in Oliver Paipoonge, in Neebing and Atikokan and Thunder Bay—I remind them of that and I say, “Just think about it for a second, because now through our uploading exercise through the OMPF and a variety of other programs, provincial assistance to municipalities has increased since 2003 to today by \$2.7 billion.” That represents the uploaded costs on OW, social housing, land ambulance, public health units—all of that work that we have been doing to take those costs back off of the municipality taxpayer that were downloaded by the official opposition when they were in government. We've taken it—maybe not all of it, but a lot of it—back, and I can quantify \$2.7 billion of it for you here today; an incredible amount.

Here's what I also tell them. I just emailed my constituency office a little while ago, I tell my friend across the way, trying to get the numbers on OCIF, the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. That's not in that \$2.7 billion that I just referenced, by the way. It's not in there.

Interjection.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Sorry? Thank you, Speaker. Oh, absolutely. Yes, this is all connected, of course, because we are talking about affordability here. We are talking about affordability. So when we can make an announcement on infrastructure, permanent money, by 2018 for a small community like Oliver Paipoonge of \$333,000 per year, every year, predictable, guaranteed that they can count on, that represents 5%, 8%, 10% of their total tax revenue. When we want to talk about hydro and a hydro bill and you want to talk about affordability for the people that live in the province, I would say to my friends across the way, including the NDP and the Conservatives, that maybe there is a bit of a broader discussion here that we need to have. Maybe there is a bit of a broader discussion.

While I appreciate that you feel like there is an opportunity on the hydro file to advance your political interests—you felt it in 2011, you felt it in 2014 and

apparently, by the narrative that continues in this chamber, you are going to continue with that in 2018—I would say: That's fine. That's your role. But there is a broader discussion to be had around municipal affordability and for people in the province of Ontario. And that's the discussion I have on a regular basis in my riding.

1530

That's the discussion I will be having in a much more vigorous way, I would say now, as Minister of Municipal Affairs, over the coming year and a half leading into the next election in 2018, to remind those folks of exactly what happened from 1995 to 2003, and before, and compare it to what's gone on now in terms of what that property tax-base bill looks like for them and what it would have looked like, had it not been for the uploads and the OMPF and the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund.

Speaker, there's a broader discussion to have here. I can appreciate why the opposition would not be interested in that broader discussion, but we're proud of the record we have on this side of the House and we look forward to telling the people of the province of Ontario exactly what it looks like.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I was paying attention to the Honourable Bill Mauro, Minister of Municipal Affairs, saying the current Liberal government is proud of municipal affordability. I really question that. Only yesterday, I read in the *Toronto Star*—and I know the facts, because I have been working as a city councillor for the last 25 years—that 170,000 people are waiting to get into affordable housing. Is this affordability? I really question that.

So many MPPs here are mentioning the Scarborough–Rouge River by-election. If there was no by-election, if Raymond Cho was not elected as the PC candidate, I don't know whether the Premier actually would have prorogued this House and given a speech from the throne.

I was really disappointed when I listened to the throne speech. It was a real band-aid solution and PR promotion. A 36-cent reduction from the skyrocketing hydro bill; I don't know whether it's parliamentary language, but a lot of people say it's a joke—and pardon me, it's not mine. Other people say that.

While I was running as a candidate, I learned so much and I met so many people. I knocked on the door of almost every household in the Scarborough–Rouge River riding. So many people said, “You know, Councillor Cho, I really wish you get elected. Between Premier Dalton McGuinty and Premier Kathleen Wynne, Ontario is going bankrupt.” I'm just quoting what some people told me.

I met one—I think she's a new Canadian, in her mid-40s, 50s, and she—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is sometimes hard to sit here and listen as if there was no hydro crisis, as if there was nothing going on, that everything is just fine. I work in my constituency office as hard as everybody else. We help anybody who comes through the door, to try to find them any programs that will help them reduce their hydro bill. But at the end of the day, people are having a tough time.

I will quote from some more of my constituents. Al Bechamp says, “There is no way a for-profit company will make rates any lower than they are right now—and right now they are at the verge of being unaffordable. CTV”—which is the TV station in Sudbury—“has said that 8% of people at Sudbury Hydro are behind in their bills. This is only going to increase. CTV is also showing stories about people going to food banks because it's either starve and pay their hydro bill or else sit in the cold and the dark.”

Another constituent, Jena, says, “Just my observation, but with the government pulling out 8% rebates, don't they see that they are setting a precedent in which the new, for-profit company will just jack rates until the public screams, and then the government will provide ‘relief,’ and doing so with taxpayers' own money? Correct me if I'm wrong but in this case won't it ensure that the for-profit company “gets the money it wants, regardless of who pays (Hydro One users or government)?”

It continues. I have Art and Louise Peach: “We write to you on the matter of great concern to my family and many I have talked to over the last while”—my, time goes by. I will have to save this one for the next. But not a day goes by in my constituency office that people don't come because they can't afford their hydro bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's always a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge to add a few comments to these debates.

I wanted to point out that when our government took office in 2003, after the large electricity outage that we had in the middle of August—when I was in the middle of the intensive care unit, caring for two patients on ventilators—we had to take action to modernize the system and replace much of the infrastructure so that that wouldn't happen again. A lot of the command centres, police stations, EMS and hospitals had to rely on generators to be able to provide that power—

Interjection: Diesel generators.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Diesel generators—to ensure that they had enough power for our emergency systems during that time.

We came into power and replaced a lot of that infrastructure. But we really took aim at the dirty, coal-fired generation of electricity, and phased it out by 2014. That was the single largest initiative to decrease not only the greenhouse gas emissions, but to ensure that we've cleaned up our air, providing better health for our families. The \$4.4 billion worth of savings annually on

health care costs and environmental costs by closing the coal plants means better health for our families, fewer emergency visits, fewer admissions and fewer lost days in productivity. When you're talking about \$4.4 billion worth of savings, you're talking about your family and friends and neighbours who are experiencing better health because of our cleaner air. With a long, hot summer, do you know how many smog days we had in Ontario? Zero. That meant better health for our families.

We recognize that clean air and better health cost. That's why we've gone ahead and rebated where we can. It's the Ontario Energy Board that sets the rates, but we've done what we can to lower it by 8% and to lower the limit for the industrial conservation initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise and comment on the minister's comments. There's so much to comment on and so little time.

Our critic this morning mentioned—and I look it up because I wrote it down at the time—that there have been 135 blackouts in Ontario, more than any other province combined. So much for the reliability—and it is unaffordable.

I hear continually about this decrepit system in 2003. I found the report from 2004 on the United States and Canada blackout. It was actually attributed back to Ohio, where a tree branch or something fell on the system and it all cascaded down. But anyway, we'll let them still stick to those talking points.

If you really want to know what the people think in small-town Ontario, I think the people of Minto told the Premier and the cabinet and the Liberal caucus last week exactly what they think of their electricity price—with what's going on.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: No, there was more than one. I saw them along the route as well. Anyway, it's a good thing it's against the law to throw tomatoes.

We're in energy poverty this province. We've got half a million people who are behind, in arrears. I think it comes to something like 170 million.

Interjection: If you're moving to rural Ontario, you're going to have seen this.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, you'll know.

I heard the minister talk about the low density rate. I wish he'd go into a little more detail and tell us who is going to actually pay that. Does that mean the rest of the urban people are now going to pay that and some of the rural people are going to get that? Because somebody has got to pay, if you're taking it off one person.

I've only got a few seconds left—you'll be glad—but I remember that I first spoke on this in May 2009; I wish I had known how accurate it was going to be. I said then that the Green Energy Act was going to be a disaster, and it was and it is.

Mr. Bill Walker: Unmitigated.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Unmitigated, yes, an unmitigated disaster. All the characters who engineered that have

gone on to bigger and better things, either in the private sector or with lobby groups.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the Attorney General to refrain from heckling.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs now has the opportunity to reply.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank all of the members who have weighed in.

The member from Scarborough–Rouge River: Thank you, and welcome. I did see you in the hall one day and welcomed you, but it's good to see you in the chamber. Your reference to prorogation: I think that I would mention, only for people who are following the debate on television, that when they hear the word “prorogation,” they think that the Legislature is shutting down. I would say to people following that when we prorogued, it was over the weekend. We did not lose a sitting day. We were here, doing our work and introducing legislation. So I want to make sure people are aware of that.

1540

To the member from Nickel Belt who talked and read a letter from one of her constituents about his particular issues—I think it was a he—I would assume, I would hope that she shared the list of other programs that have been in place for quite a significant period of time that have the potential to help her constituent with his energy bill. I would expect and hope that she was sharing those programs because, Speaker, what we're announcing today in legislation is not the beginning point on the file. This is the latest work we have done on the energy file. There are a number of other programs that have been in place for quite a period of time, and I would hope that the member from Nickel Belt found time to share those programs with her constituent.

To the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, thank you for your comments.

To my friend from Sarnia–Lambton: As I said in my speech, go ask anybody outside of this place with the bona fides when it comes to the transmission system if they think it's more reliable today than it was in 2003.

Speaker, again, I would close by saying to my constituents and to people across the province of Ontario that you want to be thinking about this in terms of total affordability. You look at your property tax bill—and we'll be doing a lot of work over the coming weeks and months, and we're going to be reminding people of what went on before we came to government—certainly I will be—and what we've been doing since we came here in 2003 to make sure that their lives are as easily manageable as we can possibly make them. I will be doing a lot more talking about that in the weeks and months ahead.

Speaker, I thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I welcome the opportunity to address Bill 13, the electricity rebate act. It really does confirm in many people's minds the importance of voting in a by-election. We saw the results of the vote. We just

heard a very brief presentation by the member from Scarborough—Rouge River. Why is he here? I think Raymond Cho can say why he's here. Well, it's because of the electricity issue. People voted to put Raymond in. They sent a very clear message to this government and, after many, many years, 13 or 14 years, perhaps this government is finally seeing the misdirection they have taken on the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member for Haldimand—Norfolk and ask the government to please come to order so I can hear the member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

The member for Haldimand—Norfolk has the floor.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you for that, Speaker. I guess it would be important to point out that since this government has taken office, the average electricity bill for people in Ontario now actually sits at \$1,000 more than it was when these chaps and ladies first came in. There seems to be a new expression in the province of Ontario: energy poverty. Why is that? Again, it's 13 years of failed policy with respect to electricity.

The other very worrisome concern—and this can only contribute, essentially, energy-generated policy and poverty—is the loss of business in the province of Ontario and the movement of investment out of the province even with a low Canadian dollar.

It's certainly something I see in my travels down in my rich riding of Haldimand—Norfolk. I did about 50 visits this spring, primarily welding shops, light manufacturing, people who redo truck bodies, things like that, people who use a lot of electricity. Many are doing well because they can sell in Ohio and elsewhere because of the Canadian dollar. That's kind of one inherent advantage we have right now, but it is having trouble competing with the high electricity prices.

We have an energy policy that is obviously diminishing our inherent competitive advantage with respect to—I think of the small businesses. Whether welding or an ice cream shop down in my riding, they are all very dependent on electricity.

With Bill 13, the province's pledge to provide a hydro rebate equivalent to the provincial share of the HST—it's something like 36 cents a day, on average. But it does nothing at all to remedy the damage that has been done over the past number of years.

This government is still signing the contracts for highly subsidized power, power that we don't need. We're still paying the US and Quebec to take our surplus power and, instead, the solution—and here's the kicker, really—is to essentially borrow about \$1 billion annually on behalf of the taxpayer, who is already tapped out, and to dole this money out to the electricity ratepayer. Really, it's all about appearing to do something rather than actually doing something to drill down on some of the core problems that have been created. Essentially, it's an approach of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Peter is not happy about this. He is getting hit with a double whammy on his taxes and on his electricity bill. Even Paul, who

receives the money, has come to realize this isn't right. This isn't sustainable. This isn't appropriate.

One other thing, Speaker: We recently found out we now have yet another dubious distinction. For years we have been talking about having among the highest energy rates in North America. Now it's official. Ontario conclusively does have the highest rates. Medium-density customers pay 22.6 cents a kilowatt hour. The low-density price has hit 25.9 cents a kilowatt hour, and that's before HST. We have now surpassed Hawaii. Hawaii was the previous record holder at 22.6 cents per kilowatt hour.

When I hear figures like a retail rate paying well over 22 cents a kilowatt hour, I hearken back to 13 or 14 years ago when we were in government, Speaker. At that time, the retail rate for the consumer was 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour. So back then, under the Mike Harris—Ernie Eves government, people in Ontario were paying 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. It was being generated at something like 2.5 cents or three cents a kilowatt hour. Now we are sitting at 22.6 cents a kilowatt hour.

Very clearly, there is a crisis in our electricity system. For Vic Fedeli, MPP, I think that was a title of his recent Fedeli Focus on Finance. We have a crisis, not only home by home within the home; we have a crisis provincially. In his 2011 report, the Auditor General laid this out, and it's been confirmed. It is now reflected, and has been reflected for a number of years, in the onset of energy poverty amongst the people that we represent.

Speaker, like many down in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk, I heat with electricity. I built my house on the farm in the early 1980s. When you build your own house, it takes many, many years. At that time, I installed a forced-air electric system. This was back when the government of the day was encouraging people to “Live Better Electrically.” It made economic sense at the time. We have a number of gas wells on our farms; it's wet gas. I don't get gas into my house from that source of natural gas. It would just be too expensive to pay to run a gas line down the road and up the laneway. I'm a fair bit up a hill, back from the road.

What am I left with? I'm heating my home, in many ways, the same way my great-grandfather heated his home. Each fall, my wife and I have to put up about 20 cords of wood. My father didn't heat with wood; he heats with natural gas. My grandfather didn't heat with wood; he heated with coal. Come to think of it, my great-grandfather heated with coal as well. So I guess it's my great-great-grandfather, who I'm pretty sure darn well heated with wood. You've pushed me back 130 years just within our family. Twenty cords of wood—sometimes it's more than that. Last winter, it was a little milder.

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I enjoy cutting wood. We have bush. I buy some wood as well. Cutting wood, heating with wood, is good for the soul. Not everybody can do that. When you're living on the 29th floor of a high-rise in Toronto, you cannot heat with wood. There's a kind of a false sense of security with many people who pay rent. They don't get a separ-

ate charge for their electricity. Many people in my riding—and I have visited them—who do pay rent do have to pay for their electricity as well.

I think the real kicker is that, for well over 100 years, electricity has served us very well in the province of Ontario. It's a wonderful invention. I use it in spite of trying to heat with wood—sometimes I can't meet the demand just with a couple of wood stoves. I use a fireplace in the fall and the spring, but that's not effective in the deep of winter. The real problem here is that the wrong people have gained control of this precious resource. They have destroyed the economic advantage of what I consider a wonderful invention.

People know this. They're coming to realize this, not only out in northern Ontario and rural Ontario, where many of us now heat with wood again, but in urban Ontario as well. Hence the tremendous backlash to this government's recent proposal that those who have natural gas—which I don't have—are encouraged to replace natural gas with electric heat. I have experience. I have been heating with electric heat for 30 years. At this point in time, given the prices, you don't want to go there. You don't want to walk away from natural gas heat and go with electricity.

There is another worry—and we are getting calls from people, as many here will be getting from their constituents—for those who have central air conditioning, those who are now opening their electricity bill after one of the hottest summers on record.

Despite this throne speech and this rebate announcement, there was a Globe and Mail investigation that revealed that rural hydro customers will see yet another increase in rates due to the rejigging of the delivery charge system, again to the detriment of those of us who live outside the city. So much for Adam Beck's 100-year vision of power to the people.

Speaking of Adam Beck and his connection with water power, the Ontario Clean Air Alliance recently released data showing that—here's one example—Cornwall's local utility has the lowest average bills in the province. Why is that? They buy their electricity from Hydro-Québec, not from an Ontario generator. The chart that they use shows Hydro One bills as the most expensive for low-density, medium-density and seasonal rates. Hydro One's urban rate isn't far behind—only surpassed by Toronto Hydro.

Many of us have returned from the plowing match. Opposition leader Patrick Brown and I had a meeting with agricultural leaders, and what we heard was that expensive electricity was one of the biggest challenges on the farm.

The government has finally realized the impact of their electricity prices. They are touting a relief plan, as heard recently in the throne speech, right after the election of my colleague Raymond Cho. But in many ways, it's a Band-Aid. Prices will continue to rise. Prices are going up again on November 1, as we know. The impact of this rebate taking HST off of electricity bills will be countered by a proposed carbon tax on natural gas and other commodities.

We have a Premier who claims to be listening to the people; she certainly has been saying that over the past several weeks, following the by-election in Scarborough—Rouge River. She indicated she did hear the reaction from people during her plowing match speech. Thanks to the media, most people have heard that reaction now to the plowing match speech, where she made mention of the rebate.

It's understandable that people are booing. They're booing as we now have something like 567,000 electricity users who are in arrears. They can't pay their bills. That's 94,000 more than in 2013. If you look at just Hydro One customers, close to 226,000 people are not paying their electricity bill; hence the term "energy poverty." Hydro One has 1.3 million customers, 17% of whom cannot pay their electricity bills.

One of those in arrears is a farmer down in my riding. He got a bill for \$21.12 in electricity, and he received along with that bill a charge of \$1,301.73 for delivery. So a little over 20 bucks for electricity and well over \$1,000 for delivery. Purolator doesn't operate that way. UPS does not operate that way.

Another resident down my way has what I would consider a fairly modest home; it's about 1,300 square feet. It's got a brand-new high-efficiency furnace, a new air conditioner, a new natural gas dryer and a natural gas water heater. His \$400 monthly bill is double what it was a year ago.

We have information from the IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator. They have noted and explained to us a drop in electricity use, and certainly what I consider a startling decrease in the industrial use of electricity. But prices went up. As prices went up earlier this year, we were told it was because of the decreased demand. That really flies in the face of basic economic theory, where price is set by that tension between supply and demand. Normally, when the demand goes up, the price goes up. Normally, when there is excess supply, the price goes down. But in this case, we had a decrease in demand and the prices went up. That flies in the face of basic economics.

Again, why is that? Well, we do know that government continues to sign very expensive contracts with wind and solar companies. We also know that over 90% of the successful bidders attended these high-priced Liberal fundraisers we heard so much about.

Here again, there is good reason why so many people are afraid to open up their electricity bill. I really wonder if the members opposite, the cabinet and the Premier, are living in the same Ontario that the rest of us are.

As we see these electricity bills climb to absurd levels, we hear more and more outlandish ideas around energy from this government, and they're countered by experts, in spite of what we hear across the way. In her December 2015 annual report, the Auditor General revealed, "Most of the increase in what consumers pay for electricity has come from generation-cost increases, which currently account for about 60% of the overall cost of electricity. Generation costs have increased by 74% over the last

decade.” The Auditor General goes on to say, “Global adjustment fees have increased significantly, from \$650 million in 2006 to \$7.03 billion in 2014.... Electricity consumers have already paid a total of \$37 billion, and they are expected to pay another \$133 billion in global adjustment fees from 2015 to 2032.” Again, it’s the result of signing expensive contracts to generate power that we don’t need in the province of Ontario.

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The IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator, in its long-term outlook, has confirmed that the cost of delivering electricity has skyrocketed by \$5 billion over the past decade. That’s a 32% increase. They note the drop in overall energy demand, which, inexplicably, in my mind, drives up the average unit cost of electricity. They talk about a 41% increase.

These outlooks reiterate the dramatic drop in industrial energy use. Companies have either cut production or have moved out of Ontario, in spite of the benefit of the low Canadian dollar. This, by extension—again, basic labour economics—does not bode well for the future of this province when we see the loss of something like—I think the figure is now up to 350,000 lost manufacturing jobs in the last decade.

So what do we have to look forward to, Speaker? More legislation, Band-Aid legislation like this one and long-term legislation like the climate change plan, which, again, will give a lot of people even more reason to be afraid to open up their electricity bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It’s always an honour to stand here and represent my constituents in Windsor–Tecumseh. After listening to my friend from Haldimand–Norfolk—you know, he lives off the land, and he’s a farmer in rural Ontario. That’s a difference of night and day from many of the Liberal members opposite.

But he’s no different than the Liberal members, because we all have our constituency offices. We all go in, we go out in our communities, we meet people, we listen to their concerns and we hear what they have to say. I guess what we’re hearing—on this side of the House, anyway—is that there’s great unrest in this province, a great deal of dissatisfaction with the Wynne government, and a lot of it has to come down to the bottom line: that is, the soaring cost of electricity.

We’re hearing it in all of our ridings. I had an email this morning from a mushroom farmer in my area. His name is Denis Vidmar, from Great Lakes Mushrooms. He says, “Mr. Hatfield, can you tell me why my hydro rates have more than doubled in the past year?”

When he opened a mushroom warehouse in May 2015, he was paying \$500 a month. When he got his bill this June and July, it more than doubled from that \$500. He wants me to tell him why. That’s a lot of mushrooms kept in the dark.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Growing in it.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Growing in the dark. But unfortunately—I hope the members of the Wynne govern-

ment opposite are listening—this is a small-business owner who’s really concerned about the rising costs of hydro in this province, and he wants me to ask the government why. I’ll leave that with them, Speaker: Why has his cost more than doubled?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: As has been mentioned by a number of our colleagues opposite, they “wish the government would listen.” I think a number of the programs, initiatives, rebates and price declines are perhaps in response to precisely that kind of a wish, whether it’s a modernized electricity system or a dirty system that has been made cleaner.

If I might, Speaker, with your permission, just speak a little bit about, I would say, the collateral medical benefits of getting rid of dirty coal-fired generation. You don’t have to actually travel to too many jurisdictions or cities across this world to, for example, take in the smog days and the extraordinary effect it has. I say this, of course, not only as a parliamentarian but also as a physician. There’s a long list of medical illnesses—asthma, COPD, emphysema, chronic bronchitis. That has been materially changed, we estimate on this side, to save the government of Ontario’s health care budget something on the order of perhaps \$4 billion-plus with regard to asthma admissions, COPD hospitalizations and medications.

If you talk to physicians who treat respiratory illnesses, they will tell you that this is a real and palpable effect. I can remember, for example, when my own daughter’s school trip went to Beijing, China. They actually had to buy N70 surgical masks for them to walk down the streets of Beijing, China. Those are the same masks, Speaker, you’ll be interested to know, that doctors had on standby for the SARS epidemic in Toronto. This was just to walk down the street.

These are real, palpable effects. I salute Premier McGuinty and the team of the day—many of whom are still here, including myself—who had the vision to do precisely that. There are a number of colleagues who were detailing some of the price declines, and I think they will speak about those elsewhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I’m pleased to stand and comment on the member from Haldimand–Norfolk’s 20-minute speech. I think there’s something that hasn’t been mentioned here this afternoon, and it has to do with rural Ontario: Many of us in rural Ontario have our own septic systems, on the farms and in the houses. If we can’t pay our bills and they come to shut that power off, our toilet facilities are gone, our water is gone and everything is gone other than the lights—no, the lights are gone too.

We’re not just talking lights here. We’re talking about a health issue that could hit some of these people because they can’t pay their bills. An 8% reduction in hydro is not going to cut it here. There’s some real deep trouble brewing if this continues, and it’s because of mismanagement of the system over the last number of years that has caused these problems.

They talk about a better system since they took over. I want to read something from the Auditor General's report: "Outages are lasting 30% longer and occurring 24% more frequently. In the same period"—this is from 2010 to 2014—"Hydro One's spending to operate the transmission system and replace assets that are old or in poor condition increased by 31%." But they're not getting the results.

"The backlog of preventive maintenance orders for transmission station equipment increased by 47%.... At the same time, the number of equipment outages on the transmission system increased by 7%...." Speaker, what they're doing is not working. They've spent so much on green energy and wind farms—that's where this money is going—that they can't keep up with the system we have. This has got to change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate today, an important debate that I think is happening in every area and community across this province, on the ability to afford what is essentially an unavoidable cost of living in Ontario, in a modern society: the cost of electricity.

I can tell you, Speaker, that we're hearing it from all sectors, whether it be public, private, residential rate-payers or small and large businesses in our community of Windsor and Essex county. Even our local hospital system, the Windsor Regional Hospital, has seen their costs increase by 25% since 2013.

I just heard the argument being made by the member from Etobicoke North about the correlated reduction of health care costs by eliminating coal-fired generation. Of course, that's something that New Democrats have advocated for decades: to eliminate all measures of airborne pollutants in the province. We know that. We've made that argument. While we were in government, we made strides towards those ends, so it's not something that is novel, that the provincial Liberals really took on, that is their own creation. We all knew that burning coal was detrimental to the health of the province and the people who live here.

However, when you add on a massive amount of costs, which continue to grow, for our public entities like hospitals that provide front-line health care to our communities, they can no longer afford to do that. That's where you see cutbacks in nursing, cutbacks in all types of services provided at our hospitals. So you're robbing Peter to pay Paul and actually affecting our front-line services in our communities.

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Something has to be done, and it definitely doesn't end with an 8% reduction. A total revamp of the way this province's energy system is delivered has to happen, and we certainly don't see that coming from the Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes questions and comments for this round. We return to the member from Haldimand-Norfolk for his response.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thanks to the member for Windsor-Tecumseh. He talks about unrest and potential unrest. I made mention of a mushroom grower whose bill had doubled, and the question was asked, "Why is this occurring?" I have a question: What do they feed mushrooms, and what are we being fed with this particular piece of legislation?

Etobicoke North, quite appropriately, talked about the health benefits of clean air. We do share a common airshed with North America, and the member opposite could obviously offer a thank you to Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and any area upwind from the city of Toronto. I guess that would not include the Thunder Bay or the Atikokan plants that have been taken off coal generation.

The member for Perth-Wellington—in my view, alluding to energy poverty: If you cannot pay your electricity bill in the country, you cannot pay to pump water. Sure, you can go out, dig a well and pump water by hand. If you don't plug in an electric blanket or don't have access to electric heat because you can't pay your bill, you could probably invest in sheep and grow wool. Perhaps you could invest in candles if it's compromising your ability to pay to turn the lights on. I guess we could continue on this trend. It may bring back a reason for Canada Post if there's no electricity to charge our cellphones and our BlackBerrys.

The member from Essex—again, hearing it from all sectors, and it's telling: When the local hospital has a 25% increase in its electricity bill, as he indicated, it's time for a revamp.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It is always an honour to stand in the House and talk about issues that are relevant to the people of Timiskaming-Cochrane and relevant to the people of Ontario. I would say that the cost of electricity is the number one issue for the people of my riding and, I believe, for the people of Ontario. So it's a good opportunity for me to spend a few minutes to talk about Bill 13, the electricity rebate act.

I had a unique perspective last week because I was driving the tractor for the NDP float at the plowing match. It was fun. I was following the Liberal float. It must have been painful for the Liberals, because the people at the plowing match were not that receptive to the government party. Rural people are naturally friendly, naturally reserved, and not everyone at the plowing match was, and a lot of it had to do with electricity rates. Actually, they were pretty polite, considering some of the things that rural Ontario is going through with electricity rates.

But as I was driving the tractor, I was reminded—I always remember comedy; I try to relate things to comedy. My favourite comic strip is the Wizard of Id. If you remember the Wizard of Id, there's a little despotic king. He's got a problem with his height. He's a very short, despotic king. He's got Rodney the knight, who's his pseudo army, and he's got the wizard, of course. The

despotic king was standing in his castle, speaking to the peasants. It was an election campaign speech and he was promising, "When I'm elected, I promise a chicken for every pot." The peasants were throwing things at him, and he couldn't understand what was wrong. So he asked Sir Rodney, and Sir Rodney says, "Well, King, it's because you confiscated their pots and melted them down for swords. So the chicken doesn't do them any good." That's kind of like Bill 13. Bill 13 has got some good things in it, but Bill 13 is coming after years and years of struggle.

If you go out to my riding—and I'm going to use my riding as an example and the ridings close to mine—we've had local businesses shut down. We've had big businesses shut down: just north of me, the Kidd Creek smelter in Timmins, a huge employer. Why did it shut down? The price of power. We've got sawmills in my riding that have shut down—the price of power. Pulp mills have shut down—the price of power. This isn't something that happened yesterday. This has been building up over years.

Quite frankly, people who have lost their jobs because of the high cost of power, people who are afraid of losing their homes and people who have actually cut the power—I have cases in my riding of people who cannot pay for the power, so the power has been cut off. And, yes, they're going to have trouble with their septic system. They're going to have trouble bathing. They're going to have trouble, because these people won't be able to buy a \$2,000 or \$3,000 generator or put up solar panels. These people have been thrust back 100 years. As the member from Haldimand–Norfolk said, he has been thrust back a few years burning wood. I burn wood as well, but if we had to, we could heat with hydro. A lot of these people can't.

The government is going to say, "Well, once again, they're exaggerating." Really? Over half a million people can't keep up with their hydro bills; 60,000 have been cut off. Now the government throws out kind of a lifebuoy and expects people to be overjoyed. This suffering has gone on a long, long time.

I believe the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan mentioned that the NDP had the policy in a couple of election campaigns to take the HST off of hydro, the provincial portion. Actually, we fought to never, ever have the HST portion put on hydro; the Liberals put it on. So he's right: We've been fighting for this for a long time. Actually, if the government hadn't put it on in the first place—because I believe the numbers show they're going to spend \$1 billion doing this for the upcoming year. Well, that means that they've already taken \$6 billion, give or take, out of people's pockets in the last six years. Now, they're saying, "Well, next year, we're going to give you a rebate, and you should be happy." People are angry, and they're rightfully angry, because people are struggling.

Delivery charges: You notice that they're going to somehow help with delivery charges for the people in low-density rural Ontario. Fantastic—but we haven't

been able to pay those delivery charges for quite some time.

I've had the opportunity of being in the House all day today. I actually like staying in House because you hear some interesting—it's not quite the same on the TV in your office. It's kind of interesting in the House. I was listening to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington about how there are no delivery charges in other provinces, and I don't really agree with that. There are delivery charges, but they're paid for per kilowatt and they're just in the price, and everybody pays the same delivery charge. What's different in Ontario is that, instead of having so-many-cents per kilowatt or whatever on every kilowatt, we charge different prices depending on where you live. That is really hard on the people in low-density rural Ontario. And it does cost more, in some cases, to put hydro into low-density rural Ontario. It does. But you know what? We should make a decision: Are we Ontarians? Are we all one type of Ontarian? Or are we going to pay a penalty depending on where we live? That's a big issue.

So the government has finally come to the realization: "Oh, well, you know what? We'd better throw the people in rural Ontario a bone. We'd better throw them a bone." But we don't know if there's a string attached to this bone, so if they grab the bone, then the next election, the string might pull the bone away again.

1620

But that's the issue. People are angry because this issue has been around a long, long time. Are we against these proposals? No. But for the government to act like these proposals are somehow manna from heaven is absurd.

I was in the House, I believe, earlier today, and I heard the Attorney General. I get along fairly well with the Attorney General—we've worked on several committees—and I appreciate something he said. He said, "Well, we've been in this government for over 10 years." So at least he's taking responsibility for some of the things that have happened in the last 10 years—because, yes, they did shut down coal. We've been pushing for that.

They also put in the smart meters, which haven't helped people in rural Ontario at all. They haven't really conserved energy at all. They've been a big cost. So, again, they should take responsibility for that.

They should take responsibility for the gas plants, because we all remember the gas plant scandal and why somehow the taxpayers of Ontario were on the hook for \$1 billion because a couple of gas plants got moved in an election campaign. That's also adding to the cost.

What we've got here is we've got an issue where this has been brewing a long time. People specifically in rural Ontario have been suffering a long time. I believe now the suffering is starting to move into urban Ontario, because even with their lower delivery charges, they're still starting to feel the pain. I don't think they feel the pain yet as much as rural Ontario. That's why the government is reacting, saying, "Well, there's going to be some kind of rebate on delivery charges in rural Ontario."

That's why they're reacting. But, to the Attorney General's credit, he did take responsibility for the 10 years. So there are those two things.

Where I have a bit of a harder deal is with my friends to the right here in the Conservative Party. I do have a bit, because I remember, I distinctly—

Mr. Bill Walker: You are one of us.

Mr. John Vanthof: I used to be one of them.

I distinctly remember my first energy shock as a dairy farmer. It wasn't under these guys. It was under these guys when the price of hydro doubled in months—in months. That was the first energy shock. And you know who actually came up with the idea of charging the delivery charge out separately? It wasn't even the Liberals. It was the Conservatives who started the delivery charge fiasco. The Liberal government has made it much worse; I'm not denying that. They haven't helped the situation. But the people who started the process of separating everything out and making people pay different prices in different parts of the province—was it the Liberals? No. It was the Progressive Conservatives. We would have to question if they were progressive on that one, but they are the ones who started it.

Speaker, do you know why? I'm sure you do, and I'm sure your friends there do—but do you know, for the people at home, why they did that, why they separated all these things out? Because the Progressive Conservatives, under Mike Harris, were the first ones to try to privatize Ontario Hydro, which I find is somewhat troubling because now they're trying to position themselves on the side of they are the saviours of public hydro. That, quite frankly, is ridiculous.

I have a lot of friends who are Conservatives. I have some relatives, believe it or not, who are Conservatives, who I respect greatly. But they have got to wonder. At least you can depend on Conservatives to be Conservatives. Conservatives believe in the private sector. They believe that the market should control as much as possible, because they believe the market is always more efficient, except when it's close to an election and they want to talk about how they're going to try to save Hydro One. Come on. Conservatives—you used to be able to depend on a Conservative being a Conservative. That's what I liked about Conservatives. I didn't really agree with them lots of times—sometimes I did—but at least you knew where they stood. These guys, I don't know. It's tough with these guys.

I distinctly remember—and this was before I was involved in politics on a provincial level—that when the Harris Conservatives tried to sell Hydro One, who fought them? The NDP, unions, and the Liberal Party. I remember the Liberals were dead set against the sale of Hydro One. Yet now we've got—the so-called Liberals won the last election because they were the progressive ones. They were going to fight for the public. Remember Hudak was going to kill everything? They were going to be the saviours. They get elected and they're doing exactly the same thing that the Conservatives would have done.

Let's make it really clear, Speaker, why the government is trying to sell Hydro One. It's got nothing to do with transit; it's got nothing to do with infrastructure. It's got to do with balancing the budget so they look good by the time the next election rolls around in two years. That's all it's about. They're playing with numbers. They're playing with numbers.

Why that's important to the people at home who get hydro bills, who can't pay them and who are in fear of opening them—what that's got to do with them is that every time we've privatized a part of the essential service of the generation and the transmission and the distribution of electricity, every time we've allowed a piece of that system to get privatized, it has cost the person who buys the electricity more money. Every time. The government can say, "Oh, no, we're broadening the ownership"—which is another farce; they're selling Hydro One. Don't give me this "broadening the ownership" crap.

Another one they shouldn't ever say again is, "Well, we're selling 60% but we're going to keep 40% and that keeps us with controlling interest." Again, come on. Even kids—the pages—could understand and would understand: If there are 10 people in the room and you have six on your side and four on the other side, the guys with six win. So if the public still owns 40% of Hydro One and they're saying, "Well, you know what? I think maybe we should do this and this because the people might not be able to pay for this," and the six on the other side say, "Well, we bought this company to make money and that's what we're going to do," guess who loses? The four people who defend the public interest.

How the government gets away with saying, "Well, we'll have 40%, so we'll still have controlling interest"—why they don't get laughed out of the House is beyond me. I didn't spend a lot of years going to school, but I paid dearly for my education, and six is always bigger than four—always.

I've only got a couple of minutes left.

Where this is so important is for the people at home, and not just individuals but businesses, who need to pay for hydro to create jobs.

One time the Minister of Environment and Climate Change—I was speaking on hydro and he interjected that we didn't have the most expensive hydro. Well, I'm not going to talk about other jurisdictions. I'll talk about a business in my riding: Koch elevators. They're a big farm; they're a big grain drier. They do a lot of work for a lot of people, and they can't afford hydro. In peak times when they are drying grain—you use a lot of hydro—you know how they generate their hydro? With diesel fuel. It's cheaper in the province of Ontario for a company to burn diesel fuel than buy hydro through this government's policies. You can talk all you want about other jurisdictions, but if it's cheaper for diesel fuel and a company like Koch Farms—the Koch family, they're not going to move. They're proud northerners. They support northern Ontario and they do what they have to do to support the farmers of that area. A lot of other companies would have already moved.

1630

Yes, there are some good things in this bill, but after 13 years of Liberal mismanagement—and some of that mismanagement wasn't even mismanagement; some was just due from inheriting an attempted deregulated mess from the Tories. So with some of the things they had no choice. But there are a lot of other things.

I heard this from the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan: that we had the chance to pass this unanimously without any debate. Who, in his right mind, representing the people of Ontario, is going to pass any type of Liberal energy policy without debate? That doesn't make any sense.

These are the guys who actually took a good program like the Green Energy Act—it was a good idea—and they actually used it to divide and conquer rural Ontario. They took a good idea like green energy and they polluted it so badly with their lack of moral compass—and plenty of Liberal ideology there—and they've almost totally destroyed green energy in this province. That's the problem. In the last election, when people voted for Kathleen Wynne, they didn't vote for that. They are sorely disappointed. I have a lot of people in my riding who are proud Liberals but certainly not proud of what's happening now.

We need to look at hydro from the perspective of the people in this province who depend on it as an essential service, and not just once in a while when an election comes up or when pressure gets too bad. We have to look at it all the time from the view of the people who actually live in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act.

Speaker, the member opposite—whom I get along with very well; I also have a chance to work with him on a committee—said that this is not manna from heaven. I think they were his words. I agree with him; it's not manna from heaven. I think it's an important step. I think that if you look at it in that context and you look at it in the context of the fact that people are struggling to pay their hydro bills and that hydro rates are too high, then this is an important step in offering people some much-needed relief. I think that's where we should be focused here today, and move this legislation through quickly so that people can get that relief as soon as possible.

There are a few pieces that are part of the bill; I just want to recap what those are for the folks watching at home. Obviously, the bill would rebate Ontario's portion of the HST for families and small businesses. This is an average saving of about \$130 annually. We're increasing protection for rural or remote customers, and this would result in a benefit for these households of about 20%, or \$540, on average. And we're expanding the industrial conservation initiative, making it possible for newly eligible medium and large businesses to achieve savings of as much as a third of their bill. As a business person,

someone who was in business just a couple of years ago before running for office, I know how important this is to our manufacturers across Ontario and therefore to job creation, and to the prosperity in so many communities across our province.

Over the weekend, I was in my riding of Etobicoke Centre at a number of events. I was at Royal York Plaza for a customer appreciation event. I was at the Canadian Italian Business and Professional Association dinner and I was canvassing my riding, and I heard about hydro rates. There's no question. But I also heard about a lot of other things that people are supportive of.

So I hope we can get the legislation passed as quickly as possible and provide people with that relief that we all agree they absolutely need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's great to be able to participate in this debate and to follow the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane, who raised a lot of issues that I know members on this side of the House and in our caucus continue to hear.

I just want to talk about some of the stories that I continue to hear in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. I attended two fall fairs this weekend, one in Glencoe and one in Forest. Next weekend, we have a fall fair in Alvinston and one in Ilderton. Thousands and thousands of people attend these fairs. I can tell you, from the conversations I had this previous weekend, that 99% of the people who I talked to are talking about hydro prices. They're talking about this government continuing to drive energy prices even higher.

It's almost on a weekly basis that we read the London Free Press, a prominent newspaper in southwestern Ontario, and we see that the Liberals continue to sign more and more expensive wind energy deals. I know that they continue to announce new deals in my riding and in Elgin—Middlesex—London. Of course, there's a controversial one in Dutton Dunwich. The people of our ridings don't want these wind turbines. Most importantly, the people of Ontario are paying higher bills because of these expensive renewable contracts that are being signed.

Speaker, I talked to seniors on fixed incomes and families with small children. There's one particular story that really hits home for me. It was about a single father who has two kids, a five-year-old and an eight-year-old, who was going to have his hydro cut off. Thankfully, the then Minister of Energy, Mr. Chiarelli, got the cut-off extended back then so that this family could get through Christmas. These are stories that we continue to hear, and it's extremely sad and really awful of this government to allow it to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It was a real pleasure to listen to my colleague speak about the absolute disaster that has been created by the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government when it comes to energy policy in the province. He did a great job in referencing the pattern of privatization that

began in the early 2000s under Mike Harris through the exercise of privatization and deregulation that has continued to lead to cost overages, increased costs that we're going to continue to see, despite anything that this Liberal government does.

What they are doing is exacerbating the problem by, again, embarking on an exercise of privatization. You'd think they would have learned from history. However, I guess the neo-liberal side of the Liberals shines through.

It's important for us to highlight the hypocrisy of the Conservative Party because whether it's the Liberal—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That word has been ruled out of order on a number of occasions by the Speaker, and I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, that's a first one for me, Speaker. I've never used it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw the word “hypocrisy,” just to make it clear.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I will withdraw that word.

It's clear; the history is clear. We've got one party that attempted and began privatization and we've got one party that's going to finish it, under the Liberals. It certainly is not doing any favours to ratepayers in this province. Their hydro bills continue to explode, and folks have no recourse. They have nowhere to turn.

We certainly want to offer them an alternative that is ending the privatization and sale of public power in the province and returning to some normalcy where we can afford the rates of generation and distribution in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's a pleasure as always to rise this afternoon and lend my voice to the debate that has taken place. I've listened closely to what is being said by members on all sides here this afternoon. Of course, this is a topic that's of great interest to people in my riding of Vaughan and people right across the province of Ontario.

I would point out, with my time this afternoon, that just a few days after the Lieutenant Governor provided us with the throne speech here in this chamber, I was actually very proud to join with Premier Kathleen Wynne and energy minister Glenn Thibeault at a particular business in my community. It's known as Vision Extrusions. We were there the Friday after the throne speech. I reference this, because, as everyone in the chamber will know, as part of the plan, as part of this particular legislation, we're talking about improvements or enhancements to the industrial conservation initiative.

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I point that out because that particular business, Vision Extrusions, based in Vaughan, based specifically in Woodbridge, is a company that has been growing by leaps and bounds over the last number of years. At the same time, it is making continued investments in the work that they do and the hundreds and hundreds of people from my community and beyond my community

that they've managed to employ because of their investments. They have been working closely with our government and others in the energy industry to arrive at a place where we can take a look at programs like the ICI program and provide this particular enhancement.

I would say, with respect to the reaction that the Premier and the Minister of Energy received that Friday at Vision Extrusions, it is clear that by moving forward with this enhancement, we are helping in a meaningful way to support continued economic development in my community here in the GTHA. More jobs are being created, more families are being supported, and that business will continue to expand.

As I'm fond of saying here, I hope members on all sides will continue this debate vigorously but, ultimately, make sure that we support Bill 13 and move it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the members from Etobicoke Centre, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, my colleague from Essex and the Minister of Transportation.

What it all comes down to in the end is, electricity is an essential service. We've always, since Sir Adam Beck, had it where it's an essential service. I believe one of his quotes is for “the poorest working man.”

Somehow in this process, we've lost this. Is this current legislation going to help? It's going to make a difference. But what about, in the last 13 years, all the people who have already lost because of this? That's why it's needed, but it's too little, too late. That's the issue. Things have to change quicker than what this legislation is doing.

I think the root cause of our hydroelectricity problems, partisanship aside, is privatization of an essential service. The Green Energy Act, if you really look close—and that's the part we weren't in favour of; I wasn't here then—was actually privatization of the generation systems. These are private companies. I don't blame the companies; they're private companies. The gas plants are private companies, and they all have to get their cut. That's where it went wrong. The privatization of Hydro One—you'd expect it from the Conservatives. I'm extremely disappointed that the Liberals are going down the same route that is going to, in the end, make it an even more unaffordable essential service. We are going to be pushed back a hundred years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned, unless the government House leader or his designate specifies otherwise.

I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: No further debate, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ELECTION FINANCES STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LE FINANCEMENT ÉLECTORAL

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 22, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to election matters / *Projet de loi 2, Loi visant à modifier diverses lois en ce qui a trait à des questions concernant les élections.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 2, Election Finances Statue Law Amendment Act, 2016.

Mr. Speaker, it was interesting. I participated in the summertime in some of the committee hearings with regard to the bill. This government is coming back—and I believe they really didn't address a lot of the things that actually were the reality of why this bill came to the floor in the first place.

It's clear the Liberal government scandal goes un-addressed, and a public inquiry still needs to explore the possible links between Liberal Party fundraising and government contracts under the Wynne Liberals. It took the media bringing this to light for them to actually address it.

We know now why the Liberal government wanted this legislation drafted behind closed doors. They wanted to control the process so that they could control the outcome, ensuring the new system only benefits themselves. They were forced to bring in these reforms because they got caught.

I'm going to talk a bit later—I brought a private member's bill, and my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex; and you, Mr. Speaker, brought a bill even earlier than that—that the Liberals could have addressed all of this many, many times previously, and they didn't. In fact, they voted unanimously against my private member's bill. I'm not sure how they can say in good nature today that this is all their doing and that they want to correct, when they really have not truly addressed it.

We in the Ontario PC caucus remain committed to developing political financing legislation that creates a level playing field and is in the best interests of Ontarians, not the Wynne Liberals' own political survival. It's about fairness and it's about the ability to debate and to be a part of democracy.

There are two significant caveats with this bill that I remain concerned about. One is that it does not end the cash-for-access pattern that has been displayed by the Liberals. This is the Liberals' primary fundraising tool—almost \$19.6 million for the Liberal Party coffers since Kathleen Wynne was sworn in back in 2013. According to the *Globe and Mail*, the Ontario Liberal Party held more than 150 intimate cash-for-access fundraisers in Ms. Wynne's first three years in power.

For example, on the evening of March 2, 2015, Premier Kathleen Wynne gathered with eight guests who paid \$10,000 each for exclusive face time. Three months earlier, 22 donors spent \$5,000 apiece to be entertained by Finance Minister Charles Sousa. Days later, eight people paid \$5,000 each to attend a reception with then-Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli, according to the *Globe*. These were just three of the more than 150 intimate cash-for-access fundraisers that that party, the Liberal Party, held in the last three years. It is believed that some of these events were attended by the banks that made nearly \$60 million off the privatization of Hydro One.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard often that they want to spin this and say that we all have fundraisers. We do, but we don't sign government contracts. We aren't the ones who are under attack by the media and the public for the perception of an inappropriate action, which actually has the ability to influence policy, to influence the letting of contracts—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize.

The government just called this bill for debate. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound has the floor. He has the right to express his views. I'd ask the government members to please come to order and respect that.

The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, it's indicative of this government's approach. They don't really want any message to be heard unless it's theirs, so that they can control the message. They don't want debate. They don't want us to present facts to them. Frankly, they have to look in the mirror and address those at some point in the future. In 2018, they're going to have to actually listen to the people of Ontario, who did not give them a mandate, frankly, to sell Hydro One, which they keep going on about as the best thing for Ontarians, when it's really what they believe is best for their short-term needs.

The second caveat with Bill 2 is the amendments the government says that it plans on introducing. I'd like to know why they aren't in the bill now, when we're debating it. Again, it seems to me that as long as they're controlling the message, as long as they have the total ability to utilize their majority and ram things through, then they're happy. They don't want to truly debate. I would suggest to you that at times, they usurp democracy, because they want to be able to just write the rules that are in favour of them. They want to continue to go down the road they've enjoyed for the last 13 years.

The point is, these amendments could have been put in the bill when it was reintroduced. They prorogued after the summer.

I want to pay tribute to my colleagues Steve Clark from Leeds-Grenville and Randy Hillier from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, who spent the bulk of their summer going across this great province, doing what we're supposed to do: listen to people, the people of Ontario, who brought their thought processes, who wanted to bring a number of amendments to the table.

Yet this government prorogued, which actually killed that bill. They brought it back under a cloak of secrecy. They wrote it behind closed doors again, without any ability to have input into what that bill was going to be.

Evidently, this government is looking to push Bill 2 through the Legislature, with apparently only modest participation by members of this House—and, by extension, frankly, the people we are privileged to represent. This never works out well, not when we, the members, are the ones responsible for explaining and justifying this legislation to the Ontario public.

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I'll use an example: the Green Energy Act. There was one again where they usurped local democracy, and look at how much face time it gets in this House, Mr. Speaker. Just think of how much we've talked about the Green Energy Act this afternoon, which they purported to be the end of the earth for all. It was going to save the world. The environment minister still suggests his thought process is going to fix the planet. With all due respect, had they allowed open debate by democracy, had they allowed democracy to truly shine through, perhaps that bill would have come through and we wouldn't have paid out \$137 billion that is not going to benefit the Ontario public.

I join my colleagues the MPPs for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington and Leeds—Grenville in sounding the alarm on the government's very peculiar proposal to transform this Bill 2 significantly at committee after second reading, if it's passed. This is peculiar, as it means this minister has no intention of presenting and debating the bill's chief principles and merits in this Legislature—cash-for-access, lobbying restrictions, members' integrity, pre-election advertising and the enactment of it all.

This no-collaboration, no-consultation approach toward the other parties is downright disturbing and frankly disrespectful. It's part of the undemocratic pattern that we've seen unfold, certainly in my almost five years here. To use a phrase I use because of my riding, it's almost Groundhog Day over and over again. "We're going to tell you what's good for you. We're not going to ask for any input." Although they will say, "We want to be open. We want to be collaborative. We want to be accountable," yet they just steamroll what they believe is best for them, not for Ontarians.

Remember the summer hearings? During the summer, the government dragged people out to hearings on the original Bill 201, the one that was riddled with loopholes and did not include a ban on the cash-for-access political fundraisers or restrictions on corporate or union members working on campaigns. It was all a sham, Mr. Speaker. Consider that they killed the original Bill 201 when they decided on a whim to prorogue, and that this new bill is only a hybrid version of the original as it precludes everything the original bill included at first reading. We now know that those 100 hours of hearings were all just for show.

It hearkens back to the budget. Those hearings were held all across the province, giving people the false sense

that they actually had a say in how the government was going to go forward with their budget, with something so critical; and yet, at the end of the day, they presented the budget even before those hearings could be recorded and actually reviewed. Respect for people who participate and sincerely want to see change has been neglected again.

Third-party advertising appears to still have loopholes. This Liberal government has gotten itself into a serious pickle over political fundraising. From big-ticket fundraising to fundraising quotas, they've used and abused the rules around political fundraising, unlike anything seen before. They've clearly decided they've padded their bank accounts enough, so now it's time to change the rules.

I'm now going to talk a little bit about it, as I said earlier. Back in October 2015, I tabled a private member's bill to adopt third-party advertising limits. The Premier and the entire Liberal caucus voted unanimously against capping third-party advertising in Ontario. To them, the Election Finances Act didn't need much fixing, even though the legislation had been drafted over 30 years ago. As I mentioned earlier, my colleague Rick Nicholls from Chatham—Kent—Essex had tabled a similar bill in 2014, and you, Mr. Speaker, the great representative of Wellington—Halton Hills, had tabled a similar bill in 2011. Three different times: This government, if they were really sincere about fixing a challenge that they now say purportedly absolutely needs fixing, could have done it with no problem whatsoever, had they wanted to truly make it different and do the right thing.

Now they seem like they're keen to steamroll this reform forward, but here's the catch: Their definition of third-party advertising does not include all advertising, does it? Bill 2 states that third-party advertising means "political advertising placed by or on behalf of a third party" and "an expense incurred in relation to,

"(a) the production of a third party political advertisement, or

"(b) the acquisition of the means of transmission of a third party political advertisement to the public."

I ask them: What about issue advertising? To me, third-party advertising means advertising in any broadcast, print, electronic or other medium, including by telephone, Internet or text messaging, if the purpose of the advertising is to take a position on any issue within the competence of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

My PMB had the definition of third-party advertising amended by adding "or issue advertising" after "political advertising." Without such protection for voters, I wonder what kinds of loopholes or circumventions they've allowed in with their vague definition.

It's interesting what happens when the media gets involved and the public starts to challenge them on things that are actually seen to be self-serving. All of a sudden, they have now found religion on electoral reform and financing.

The Liberal government voted against my motion, your PMB and also my colleague from Chatham—Kent—

Essex. Three times in House, as I've stated, they had the ability, just in the short term, to actually change this, to do the right thing, to make it fair for all people and to actually respect democracy. Now, all of a sudden, because they got caught with their hand in the cookie jar, they decide they need to do this.

If they don't want to listen to me, and they think this is just because I'm on the opposite side of the House challenging them, what about the multiple recommendations from Greg Essensa? As Chief Electoral Officer, he has been calling on the government a number of times to do three things: (1) to adopt third-party spending limits, (2) to adopt third-party contribution limits, and (3) to strengthen the reporting requirements for third parties and adopt stricter registration and anti-collusion permissions.

This is, as it was in my bill, about fairness. The principle of fairness is paramount and fundamental to engaging everyone in our democratic process. We want the new legislation to provide a guarantee that everyone plays by the same rules and that anyone, regardless of their financial status, is able to participate on an equal basis.

Consider Mr. Essensa's findings: In the 2000 general election there were 20 registered third parties, and they collectively spent \$1.85 million. Of note, the collective advertising spending of third parties amounted to 5% of all election spending in this general election. There were three third parties that spent between \$100,000 and \$1 million, and there was one third party that spent over \$1 million; it spent \$1.08 million.

In the 2011 general election, there were 22 registered third parties, and they collectively spent \$6.08 million. Of note, the collective advertising spending of third parties amounted to 14% of all election spending in this general election. There was one third party that spent between \$100,000 and \$1 million, and there were three third parties that spent over \$1 million, one of which spent almost \$2.7 million.

In the 2014 general election, there were 37 registered third parties, and they collectively spent \$8.64 million. Of note, the collective advertising spending of third parties amounted to 17% of all election spending in this general election. There were six third parties that spent between \$100,000 and \$1 million, and there were three third parties that spent over \$1 million, one of which spent almost \$2.5 million. None of these expenses included such things as web-based campaign videos, telephone town halls or demon dialers.

At the same time, voter turnout has been falling steadily. Ontario used to enjoy a 65% voter turnout, but then, by the 2000 election, a 57% turnout; in the 2007 election, a 54% turnout; in the 2011 election, a 48% turnout; and in the 2014 election, a 48% turnout. The 2014 election saw a record high number of spoiled ballots: 31,399 Ontarians declined their votes in the last election, the highest rejection level since 1975. But boosting voter engagement and participation is not Bill 2.

I remain very concerned. Some of the other loopholes are how much money the government can actually spend.

I hear from constituents on a fairly regular basis, even as recently as a couple of months ago, that the current Liberal government spending—I've asked the question, "How much are you spending on ads to tell us how wonderful health care is under your government?" What about the money to actually go to the front lines so people can get appointments at the time they need them, so they can actually get the medicines they need when they need them, as opposed to the self-serving messages we hear and have to be subjected to in our media?

There are a number of challenges still within there. Just today, my colleague raised a concern in regard to the amendments the government says it is actually going to plan on introducing—they could have been put in the bill when it was reintroduced—and a breach of members' privileges, when they can't debate a partial bill.

We have to ensure that the public trusts all of us, that they know there is actually debate going to happen on bills that are going to have such an impact on all of us over the years. This is a fundamental democratic issue, Mr. Speaker. If people do not trust that the government is here to serve them, the people we are given the privilege to serve, then it's a dark day for democracy here.

There are a number of very specific things I want to talk about, like cash for access, which, as I say, all of a sudden became a challenge when the media came out and actually started challenging the government. They all of a sudden sprang into action: "We're going to fix this. We're actually going to take the opportunity to change this," although in 2015—I just have to say it again—they had the ability to amend it at that time with my PMB. Every single member across there has to go and look in the mirror and look at their constituents and answer the question, "Why did you vote against that bill then, and all of a sudden, just because the media brought it to your attention, now you've found there's a huge need for change?"

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We know Premier Wynne allowed her ministers to fundraise from stakeholders with active files before their respective ministries. She also admitted that cabinet ministers were given fundraising quotas they had to meet. The Ontario government should not be for sale to the highest or the largest Liberal donor, and government contracts, grants or subsidies should never be traded for political favours. Unfortunately, the current legislation does nothing to address the perception that stakeholders trade cash for access. We will continue to hear of secret fundraising targets that give the impression that Liberal ministers are being instructed to cash in on their public office in order to fundraise. We've actually seen now, Mr. Speaker, that senior bureaucrats are going to be the veiled bagmen or bagwomen to go to these events, that it won't necessarily be the minister anymore, but we still fear that the same old regime is in place.

We still believe there's a need for a public inquiry to investigate the fundraising practices of the Liberal Party and members of Premier Wynne's cabinet. It is this unethical behaviour that is so offensive to Ontario families

and businesses who work hard to pay their taxes and play by the rules. People shouldn't have to ask whether or not there was a conflict of interest. Let's make it clear right from the beginning.

The coming government amendments: The government plans to introduce amendments to the bill during committee which will substantially alter the intent and function of the bill. In doing so, this government is depriving the Legislature of the ability to debate this new incarnation of the bill and its merits. Debate on a bill is meant to function as a safeguard for the public interest. It's fundamental to what we do. That's the whole reason you have the opposition and the third party: to be able to challenge the government, particularly in a majority situation that they, in my belief, are actually taking advantage of. They're trying to steamroll through without debate, and that's just simply not what Ontarians expect. It's not what Canadians expect.

Eliminating the pre-election government advertising: The Ontario Liberal Party shouldn't be using taxpayer money on self-congratulatory messages, as I just mentioned. It's shameful. I hear it day in and day out from people, that they can't get a doctor, they can't find the service for their children, and yet they have to hear on the radio how wonderful the system is.

We're very fortunate. I'm going to suggest that right off the bat. We still, as Ontarians, are very, very fortunate. But at the end of the day, what could we have with all of that money and all of the money that they spend on the highest debt level for a province in Canadian history? Some \$330 billion is what the Auditor General is suggesting the debt will be. Just think if that money, \$11 billion a year, could go into front-line programs and services in health care, in education, in social and community services, in accessibility concerns, for long-term care and seniors. Just think what we could have.

I believe that we should have had stricter penalties. In my private member's bill, I actually put in that if people were caught gaming the system—third-party advertisers gaming the system—they would not be able to participate in the next election. There has to be some teeth in any legislation that we put forward or they'll just pay the fine. Just saying, "Well, you're just going to have to pay a little fine if you get caught" is not acceptable. That's not going to change the culture. It's not going to change the activities and the way people look at this.

The Chief Electoral Officer has said that collusion is too high a threshold to try and prove. So, Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that there's actually some teeth in this. We want to ensure that people have the ability to debate. We should have the ability to debate on behalf of the constituents we're given the privilege to represent. We've brought this bill to the table. The Liberals unanimously voted against it. The media got involved and brought it out and the public perception got so strong that finally they came and said, "You're right. It has to be fixed."

But if they were truly sincere, if they truly wanted to be who they purport themselves to be, they would open

this bill up to ensure that it was going to be debated fairly, equally. We called for an inquiry. We called for a select committee to ensure all members of this Legislature and, in fact, the Green Party could have some stake in the game.

At the end of the day, please respect democracy. Please respect the people that we're all given the privilege to come and represent in this great House and ensure that we all have an ability to debate this bill before you ram it down and there's no ability to change it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always a pleasure to follow my good friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. He gets a lot of words into his 20 minutes. My father used to say when somebody spoke that fast that they must have been inoculated with a gramophone needle, and I believe that may have been the case.

The member talked about Groundhog Day, and we keep hearing things in here that come and go. He knows of which he speaks because he used to be with Wiarton Willie on the 2nd of February quite a bit.

He talked about the cash-for-access, which led us to the bill of which we speak today.

He talked about the Liberals, their hands being caught in the cookie jar. I guess it's similar to their hand with the harmonized sales tax. They brought it in six years ago. Now there's a furor over rising hydro rates. Their hand is in the jar. It shouldn't have been there in the first place. They've got to take the hand out of that one.

The hand on this one, I guess, we owe somewhat to the exposé, if you will, in the Toronto Star, about how Liberal cabinet ministers had a quota to raise money. They would go off to the people who had an interest in whatever ministry they held and say, "Come to my fundraiser. I've got to raise some money for the Liberal Party of Ontario." This caused great consternation across the province. The Liberals heard about it and said, "Okay, we're going to do something about it." Good for them for doing something about it, although, like that hand in the cookie jar, they shouldn't have been doing it in the first place. You shouldn't send your cabinet ministers out to raise money from the people that they do business with on a daily basis, people who are trying to influence public policy in this province.

The hand in the cookie jar is there. It's there on the GST, and nobody should ever forget that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a pleasure to respond to the comments from the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

I wanted to reflect on one thing that he said in his remarks. He talked about the whole committee process as being just for show. Now, I would have thought that the member would have greater respect for those kinds of committee processes because we heard from people right across—and there were numerous, substantive recommendations from all parties, which came forward as a

result of those committee hearings. I got the pleasure of going to one in Windsor, and I heard from the member of the Communist Party of Ontario. When the member talks about it being just for show—nothing came of it—he really has to reflect on the comments from his colleague the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, who, in his long-winded remarks, went on at great length about how the only people he thought we'd listened to was the Communist Party of Ontario and the suggestions that they were making, and that he claimed we were picking up holus-bolus.

You can't have it both ways. You can't be looking in two directions at the same time. Our bodies aren't built that way.

Interjection: That was after first reading.

Mr. Arthur Potts: After first reading. We know that there was a lot that we picked up—in fact, as I recall, as we went through committee clause-by-clause hearings and as we brought forward amendments, which were in fact inspired by some of the amendments coming from the members opposite, the official opposition—inspired because they wanted to create a regime where our ministers couldn't attend fundraisers whereas their leader and they could.

Mr. James J. Bradley: At \$10,000 apiece.

Mr. Arthur Potts: At \$10,000 apiece, why wouldn't you do it? You can't have it both ways.

They weren't just for show. It was a very important part of our democratic process, and we'll have a chance to do it once again. People will look at those new amendments we've brought forward. We've heard much debate around it, and I'm looking forward to us doing those clause-by-clause discussions after second reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to get the opportunity to make a comment on Bill 2, the Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act.

I want to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his comments and the points that he raised during debate. I'm hoping the governing side was taking notes about some of the comments he made because he's bringing representation from his own riding and from the committee meetings going forward.

I heard a lot of comments on the government side cutting up that he was bringing these views forward. I think during this bill, especially during debate, maybe it's just about time the government starts listening to the opposition parties and making notes so that when we go to committee, when the government brings in their amendments that they didn't want to bring into the legislation, when the opposition parties bring in amendments such as those put forward by the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the government is actually going to take a good look at making some substantial changes to this bill in order to ensure that at the end of the day, we have a bill that represents the needs and wants of Ontarians with regard to election finances and the changes that are necessary.

1710

A point that the member did bring up, though, is third-party advertising. The fact that, in the last election, third parties outspent both the NDP and the PC combined speaks volumes to the fact of how distorted elections can become, when third parties have put forth a message one way or the other to lure votes away from a party. We can only think of perhaps the backroom deals that went on with the Premier before the election, promises that, if you were in fact to put forth third-party advertising, you'd get something in return.

However, it's unfortunate that the government is possibly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I think I have to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Okay, I'll withdraw, Speaker.

Anyway, it's interesting that they won't touch third-party advertising, when in fact the government changed the advertising laws for itself. The Auditor General has even spoken that she wouldn't even have let those advertisements go forward. So the government doesn't have a good ground to stand on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate. It is interesting that we are debating this bill, the Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act, Bill 2, as a necessity to prohibit future governments from doing what the current government has continued to do. It's quite remarkable that only due to an exposé by various media sources, but mainly the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail, do we even know that this government has been acting as a cash-for-access type of government for quite some time, where ministers had quotas. So you have cabinet quotas to achieve to be able to earn your seat, a target of \$500,000, in some respects, that the ministers would have to achieve; so that level of fundraising before—who knows?—they were allowed to push their own initiatives.

It is remarkable, and it's quite in contrast to what New Democrats have always done: grassroots organizing, grassroots community fundraising. That's where it should be. When I talk to my colleague legislators in the United States, who are beholden to corporate donations, massive corporate donations—these super PACs that give millions of dollars—that's where the problem lies: when you have financial interests that dictate policy. Again, thankfully, we see the Liberal government taking the leadership from the province of Alberta, the NDP government, under Rachel Notley, and starting to—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member from Essex.

The noise from the government benches is such that I can't hear the member for Essex. So I'd ask you to please refrain from heckling him.

I'm going to give you some extra time, member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate it. You know you've hit a nerve when they start barking from the back benches, and that's okay.

But obviously, New Democrats seek to make this bill stronger to ensure that there are no loopholes, and to level the playing field for not only this sitting of the Legislature but for future sittings of this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to thank the members from Windsor–Tecumseh, Beaches–East York, Elgin–Middlesex–London and Essex.

My good friend and colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh referenced that I get a lot of words in, Mr. Speaker. Many of you will know that I'm an auctioneer—and part of the reason why I brought my PMB is because what I kept hearing out there was: "Well, what do you say? What do you pay? How much will you pay to have access to a Liberal cabinet minister today?" Mr. Speaker, it was just intolerable. I just could not hear that over and over, and I had to bring that to light.

It's like Groundhog Day, as he also referenced. It's the same old same old, with a slightly different twist or spin on it, but at the end of the day, nothing changes across the aisle.

My colleague from Beaches–East York talked about committee hearings and wanting to listen to the people. I again refer him back to the budget process, where they didn't even get time to actually collate all the responses from the committee and they brought out a budget, which had to have been printed long before. I believe these committee meetings are very similar. My good colleagues from Leeds–Grenville and Addington–Lennox or whatever, Randy Hillier—51 amendments they had and not one of those was actually accepted. He talked about having it both ways. As I referenced in my remarks, the Liberal Party had three different opportunities—your bill, my colleague Rick Nicholls's bill and my bill—and they voted unanimously, as recently as 2015, that there was no need, there was nothing underhanded, there was nothing wrong going on with third-party advertising. But all of a sudden, when the media started to turn up the heat, when they started to worry about the public's perception of them not telling the truth, all of a sudden they saw the need to actually step up.

My colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London said it very eloquently: This government needs to start listening to the people that we're all given the privilege to represent. It's about fairness. It's about democracy and about everybody being able to have a good debate so that we have the best legislation possible going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand in my place and bring the issues of the people from Kitchener–Waterloo to Queen's Park today.

We're debating Bill 2, Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act, and, quite honestly, I've been looking

forward to this day since the summer, from the first meeting that we had at the end of June, beginning of July. I was wondering all along, was this process going to be a genuine, transparent process? And in fact, I have to tell you that all the concerns that we had, all the fears that we expressed as a party and, actually, through documentation, when our leader, Andrea Horwath, wrote the Premier and said that this process clearly is a flawed process—you'll remember, of course, that the Premier drafted, herself, the first draft of Bill 201. What we had argued was, let's get this right. Let's make sure that the informed voices, our independent officers of the Legislature, our electoral officer, the Auditor General, the Integrity Commissioner—let's pull them in at the beginning so that we don't have to backtrack when we see that there are gaps in the legislation.

Not only are there gaps today, Mr. Speaker—after the prorogation we have a version of Bill 2 that went through the amendment process—but then we have this shadow. And that's exactly what it is: We have the press release shadow from the clause-by-clause process that we went through. It's very disappointing. It's quite precedent-setting, Mr. Speaker, that we have a piece of legislation before us, and then we have these amendments—these talked-about amendments, the substantive amendments that this government has promised to bring to the Legislature when they actually had the opportunity to bring a complete bill before this House. They have been bragging about these amendments, these transformative, substantive amendments, and yet they did not include them in Bill 2.

Our House leader, Mr. Vanthof, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, did write to the Speaker of the House on this very issue, and in support of the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. In fact, our caucus was committed to that process—in that he had said an argument that is strengthened considerably by the September 8 prorogation of the House. So when the government prorogued, they had the opportunity to bring forward a piece of legislation which was whole, and yet they did not.

Part of the correspondence that we sent the Speaker of the House said that, as of August 29, 2016—we wrote, "While we maintain strong reservations about the announcement, it was clear that the changes proposed were, in the government's own words, 'extraordinary'"—so they were admitting that there are changes coming to Bill 2—"and would drastically alter the bill." We don't really know what that bill is going to look like going forward.

"Had the House not prorogued, the government would have a viable, if problematic, argument for waiting until the next round of clause-by-clause consideration to introduce these substantive changes. Although the government had the option to redraft the bill and introduce new legislation that reflected this change in direction, first reading committee hearings do not force the government to proceed with a bill. A case for consistency could be made to continue with Bill 201 and make the amendments at the next appropriate stage."

So why I'm sharing this with the folks that are watching, including my parents, is that the government had the opportunity to bring forward a piece of legislation which we could debate on the floor of this House, as is our right to do so as members. There is a parliamentary tradition in this place that we have the opportunity to see a whole piece of legislation.

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The reason why I'm a little sensitive to this is that we did travel around the province. I do want to thank the clerks, the research staff and the translation staff who actually helped make that process a good process.

I also want to thank the citizens who came out. They came out from across the province. Of course, they were not speaking to the substantive changes because these substantive changes were not part of the draft legislation. But they did raise some very good concerns around government advertising, around the conflict of interest and, ultimately, about the cash-for-access culture that has become part and parcel of this place.

I also wanted to thank the independent officers of the Legislature who gave us good advice, some of which is not captured in Bill 2, especially from the Auditor General and her needed oversight over government advertising—not part of this legislation at all.

I want to thank the leader of the Green Party. He came. He wasn't part of the process of travelling around the province, of course, but he did come to speak to the committee. I did have the opportunity, actually, just last Monday to talk. We were sitting on a panel on migrant farm workers together, and he said, "What is going on?" I explained, and he said, "So it was basically a farce." And I said, "Basically, it was." I hope he doesn't mind me sharing that. But he didn't have to do the travelling.

There is a sense of frustration on this side of the House—and I think you got that yesterday from the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I will say also that the Conservative members were so frustrated during clause-by-clause that we got to the fifth clause after five hours. The Attorney General brought down a little press release, the statement from Minister Naqvi, which was read right into the record on the fifth amendment—unprecedented, really; not ruled out of order, of note—and which drastically changed the work that we were doing in that committee.

It's understandably frustrating. The PC committee members who had served the entire summer until this point walked out. I am pleased, though, that I was able to do some of their work for them because we had some shared concerns around transparency, around accountability, around conflict of interest, around the integrity of the process, to be quite fair.

When this press release was read into the Hansard at clause-by-clause, we basically got a little show. One of the members was asked to read it into the Hansard.

I think, for us, because we were consistently trying to put the electorate at the centre of this process—and there was a lot of talk about leveling the playing field. Even when we were in Ottawa, there did seem to be moments

where we were actually trying to figure out third-party advertising and advocacy groups weighing in on elections. At the very beginning, there was a moment when I thought, "Okay, we're invested in this." Even the reporter from the Ottawa Citizen, David Reeverly, said, "It seems like this might be—is this a real process?" I said, "You know, it's early days."

So it is obviously disappointing for us to have prorogation and have this reset, and then have this government introduce this shadow of this piece of legislation and not have it for us, as parliamentarians, to actually debate. It seems a fair thing for us to have some frustration over. That is why I think our House leader goes on to say here:

"However, because of the prorogation, this House is no longer dealing with Bill 201, and the government was required to table the bill as a result, which significantly changes the way we should examine the current bill. I share those frustrations. While it is true that all parties speak to amendments during the course of debate, such a blanket statement fails to reflect the reality that opposition parties did not have input in the drafting of government legislation and can only affect it through amendments."

We have the Attorney General, who has said, "Bill 2 is here." I'm going to talk about some of the weaknesses that are still contained within Bill 2, and that we are still committed to trying to fix, because we have to honour the people who came to the committees over the summer. We have to be true to and respectful of the people of this province.

We are going to continue to try to make Bill 2 a better bill. We're still going to follow that course. But to have the minister responsible for the introduction of Bill 2, the Attorney General himself, introduce this piece of legislation, then also say that there's this other part of it that will substantively transform Bill 2—I think it's precedent-setting for this House, which is why we're disappointed with the determination that the Speaker made earlier.

Simply put, Bill 2 did not have to be rushed back in an incomplete state. This is important. With no Canadian context to offer insight into the possible impact of the proposed yet undisclosed changes, it can be argued that the government has a responsibility to present these ideas before the Legislature so that they could be appropriately debated, in keeping with parliamentary tradition.

And there are legitimate questions as to how such things would work. What changes to existing legislation are required to implement a new process? Most importantly, there is a responsibility to provide Ontarians with the opportunity to reasonably examine these proposed changes both in the context of a bill and through their elected representatives on all sides of the House, including New Democrats, including Progressive Conservatives.

I'm sure that we would all agree that any member making such a charge should allow the opportunity to do the necessary research to ensure that such a step is appropriate. That did not happen.

The government has every right to use its powers to pass legislation; however, this right is exercised in conjunction with the opposition's responsibility to hold the government to account, an obligation that requires a minimum standard of disclosure, so that MPPs on all sides of the House can do their jobs in an informed manner.

This does set a very dangerous precedent, I think, Mr. Speaker. Although Bill 2 may not be subject to the same degree of public scrutiny as other bills, the government's attempt to minimize parliamentary scrutiny has the potential to set a dangerous precedent, and now it has passed. This can happen with any piece of legislation going forward now, because any future government that seeks to change policy in the province of Ontario can cite this case.

That seems to be the way that this Liberal government is operating. This is not the government that Kathleen Wynne, the Liberal Premier of this province, promised the people. You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that she promised a new government, ruling from an activist centre, being open and transparent. We're debating a bill that we don't have all the materials for. It is really astonishing. It's astonishing that this is the new open and transparent Kathleen Wynne government. And yet this bill that we have before us is not the whole bill.

New Democrats at the committee—105 amendments were made—tried to reflect the voices of the people whom we heard throughout the committee process. We tried to bring substantive changes to banning cash-for-access by tightening conflict-of-interest rules. The Liberals voted it down. We tried to ban partisan government advertising, which would ensure that the Auditor General has oversight of advertising. This government voted it down.

It's interesting, because when the Auditor General came to the committee, she basically said—and it was very powerful—that her job right now is essentially a joke, because the Government Advertising Act was so changed through the Budget Measures Act, 2015, that she can only say whether or not a commercial or advertising is compliant with that piece of legislation. Well, that's a flawed piece of legislation, which gives the government full access to use Ontario taxpayer dollars to advertise whatever they want. That is a, I think, fundamental breach of trust and breach of our democracy, by using their money to advertise government initiatives and put a spin on it.

In fact, during the committee, the Auditor General was very clear. She gave us three very good examples of where she would have said that this government has overstepped that line. One, of course, was the climate change advertising, where we see David Suzuki talking about the Ontario Climate Change Action Plan before this House even saw it. Looking scared, he's delivering a speech to scared schoolchildren. We, as a Legislature, had not seen that piece of legislation.

1730

There was the issue of \$160 billion on infrastructure. Well, the Auditor General says it is not clear, it is not

completely open for this government to say that they're spending that because that covers potentially three other successive governments. It's a 12-year commitment. And yet this government says we're doing this now.

There are so many examples which cause the taxpayers of this province and the citizens of this province to really question what is happening here when they watch their TV and they see this government advertising. One constituent came to me after spending eight and a half hours in an emergency room waiting room. The commercial saying that they have reduced wait times by such-and-such an amount came on four or five times. This constituent was so angry because she had to sit in that waiting room for eight and a half hours and watch government advertising saying that those wait times don't exist anymore.

The final example that she mentioned was the ORPP. And, of course, for the government to say that they were going to address the pension crisis—it was probably, just to use the Premier's language, “a stretch goal.” We all wanted that lady to get over the river, but to spend \$70 million to basically lobby the Trudeau government at a cost to the taxpayers was really, I think, another example of this government using their power—their majority power—and this very weak piece of legislation called the Government Advertising Act to spend taxpayer dollars to put their spin on what is happening in the province of Ontario. I believe the Auditor General when she says that her job now to oversee this is a joke. She actually warned the government that this would happen back in 2015.

So we really fought—it was really a lot of what I talked about at the committee. But also, we looked to protect free speech while cracking down on super-PAC-style third-party political advertising. The government also voted this down, this amendment that we brought forward. We brought forward amendments around new rules for lobbyists, because you can't talk about cash-for-access and not address the lobbyists and the lobbying act, and, of course, the Liberal government voted this down.

Finally, and, I think very importantly, we also said that we need new rules for conflict of interest. This is to address what really is the fundamental issue of why we started down this journey as a Legislature. When the public at large learned, through the media reports from the Toronto Star and the Globe, that massive amounts of money were being donated to the Liberal Party, which were directly connected to a ministry and a stakeholder, they were aggravated, and for good reason. They definitely felt—and this came through and I'll read some direct quotes from Hansard—the citizens of this province heard very clearly, I think, that policy and legislation were being influenced by donations. This came forward at every stop along the way.

And just to go back to the premise of what we're dealing with, Bill 2 has some good parts in it. We all agreed to ban corporate and union donations. We all thought that the limits should come down significantly, and they have. Those are good components of Bill 2. But what it doesn't address, really and ultimately, is cash-for-

access because that is directly connected to conflict of interest. So we have a piece of legislation here which is silent on conflict of interest.

The Integrity Commissioner was pretty clear on this, as well. We would love to see the Integrity Commissioner have additional powers to ensure that conflict of interest is not happening. Right now the only avenue that we have in this Legislature is for one MPP to file a complaint against another MPP, which is a very uncomfortable thing to do, I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, as I have had to do it. I think that there needs to be a strengthened position from the Integrity Commissioner's office, where perceived conflict of interest can be investigated, because this government has given that Integrity Commissioner many examples to look into.

To go back, though, how we got here is that once the exposure of these high-priced-ticket, stakeholder-directed fundraisers started to happen—I go back to July 6: “An Inside Look at Cash-for-Access Ontario Liberal Fundraisers.” This was from Adrian Morrow. He writes, “On the evening of March 2, 2015, Premier Kathleen Wynne gathered with eight guests who paid \$10,000 each for exclusive face time. Three months earlier, 22 donors spent \$5,000 apiece to be entertained by Finance Minister Charles Sousa. Days later, eight people shelled out \$5,000 each to attend a reception with then-Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli.

“These were just three of more than 150 intimate cash-for-access fundraisers the Ontario Liberal Party held in Ms. Wynne's first three years in power. At the events, contributors paid thousands of dollars each to bend the ears of the Premier and members of her cabinet privately, typically over cocktails and dinner at five-star hotels or high-end restaurants.

“The Liberals have refused to disclose who bought tickets to the fundraisers....

“A Globe and Mail investigation has assembled likely guest lists....

“The analysis reveals that attendees included construction firms with lucrative government infrastructure contracts, electricity companies with an interest in seeing the government continue outsourcing much of the province's power generation, pharmaceutical corporations that depend on the province to list their drugs for coverage and the banks that made nearly \$60 million off the privatization of Hydro One.

“There is a pattern of industry-specific events,” the article goes on to say, “in which corporate elites, union leaders and lobbyists in a given sector were invited to pay for time with the Premier or the minister involved in their file,” outside of business hours.

That's the other piece. We all have a responsibility to meet with stakeholders. Stakeholders can come to this place during business hours.

“Cash-for-access,” the writer goes on to say, “has become the Liberals' primary fundraising tool. From Ms. Wynne's February, 2013, swearing-in to the end of 2015, the party held 223 fundraisers, of which 159 were private affairs for 50 or fewer guests. After event costs, the Liberals collected \$19.6 million for party coffers.”

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I remind the government members that there's only one member who has the floor at a time. The member for Kitchener-Waterloo has the floor. If you wish to engage in this debate, there will be an opportunity when we go in rotation. I need to hear the member for Kitchener-Waterloo. She has the right to participate in this debate. She has the floor.

I return to the member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm getting to the point of this, which leads to why Bill 2 is still a flawed piece of legislation: “But the legislation, unveiled last month”—this is the legislation that the Premier wrote—“will allow cash-for-access to continue. It has no conflict-of-interest provisions to ban ministers from fundraising among stakeholders, nor does it require politicians to disclose when they are lobbied.”

A reasonable person would conclude, “No one would have dropped that type of money unless they thought or knew it would help them gain access and be listened to,” confided one insider at a major corporation that does business with government. “A two-hour dinner with the Premier or minister is pretty watertight when it comes to an opportunity to have your voice heard.”

This is the context and this is why the context is important.

So the summer went on, we still kept meeting with people and we still kept raising the issues, but then, on August 4, the Premier once again was noncommittal on ending cash-for-access fundraising but was “very open to having that conversation.” There are a lot of conversations that happen here in this place.

The problem is that as the summer went on, the committee members—the PC members and myself—discovered that the government was not serious about addressing the cash-for-access issue. So we kept the pressure on because that's our job.

1740

Then on August 22: “Ontario Liberals Tighten Donation Caps, But Won't Ban Cash-For-Access Events.” This is interesting because the Attorney General at one point goes on to defend the practice of the spaghetti dinners. This is August 22. We've done our consultation. We finished our travelling. The bill is being crafted. We're submitting our amendments, which were substantive amendments. The Attorney General is still doing interviews with the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star and the major media outlets. He's still saying on August 22, “You know what? If I have 10 lawyers come to my spaghetti dinner, I think they have a right to come to my spaghetti dinner.” Ten lawyers coming to the Attorney General's spaghetti dinner at \$50, \$25—who cares? That's not the point. The point is, he was still defending the practice of having—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I remind, again, the member for Davenport in particular and the

member for Northumberland–Quinte West that the member for Kitchener–Waterloo has the floor and I need to hear her; I have to hear her. So I would ask you to refrain from heckling.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo has the floor.

Ms. Catherine Fife: He's still defending the very thing that, four or five days later, he introduces through a press release as banning all MPP fundraisers.

That is really important because in between August 22 and the August 26 revelation, the time that the press release came down, I got this letter from the Premier—because, of course, I had written to the Premier. In this letter, the Premier says, "Our government is in the midst of election finance reform through an open, transparent and credible process that includes engaging opposition parties...."

What we have before us is not an open process, it is not a transparent process and it certainly is not a credible process that we are dealing with here. She goes on to say, "We're committed to a rationalized, depoliticized and evidence-based process when determining policy." Once again, that is not what we are dealing with right now here with Bill 2.

When we came to the conclusion that this was turning into a circus—and actually, someone told me that it reminded them of that fairy tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where there's this conversation about being honest and giving good advice, but not really being open, giving good advice or being honest. It turned out that we were going through an exercise which the Attorney General and the Premier were constantly trying to adapt to because they weren't able to wiggle out of this banning cash-for-access.

What you have here is the promise—and we know how Liberal promises go—of banning all MPPs from fundraisers, which then, of course, shifted the role of political staffers, which was not originally addressed in the press release, I might say, but has been an issue. It has been an issue, with political staffers in ministers' offices taking the lead on stakeholder relations for fundraising. This has been well documented. There is a complaint before the Integrity Commissioner. Unfortunately, the Integrity Commissioner does not have the legislation with which he can do his job, which we tried to change in this process.

You have so many loopholes that the natural conclusion you can come to, after travelling the summer, listening to Ontarians, responding to this constantly shifting, make-it-up-as-you-go-along election financing from the Liberal government, is that they are going to do whatever they're going to do because that's what they've done so far, and past behaviour is very indicative.

The good thing, though, is that people have caught on; they really have. The media watched it. We did make an effort to stay in touch. This is sort of inside baseball a little bit, but it does affect our democracy. That's the key part: There was such a breach of trust, I think, when this entire situation was exposed that the people of this province really and genuinely, and for good reason,

wondered, "What is going on here? Why is the Premier sitting in a corporate boardroom on Bay Street with people who want something directly related to a piece of legislation that is currently before the House?" Any reasonable person would conclude that there is a conflict of interest there, and the Integrity Commissioner did make that ruling as it related to the finance minister and the Minister of Energy. That's very clearly outlined in his report back to this Legislature: that a reasonable person would conclude that if you have five or six bankers in a boardroom with the Minister of Energy and they are bidding on Hydro One—they're part of the bidding process; they're seeking part of Hydro One—that a reasonable person would conclude that that's a conflict of interest.

Bill 2 was an opportunity to address that breach. It does not, which is most unfortunate, because now you have the Attorney General and the Premier playing games with election financing, saying, "Well, now we're going to change everything. All the rules are going to change, but we're not going to share the rules with you." It's unconscionable. We do not have the amendments to Bill 2. You can't tell me that we do, because we don't. What we do have is a press release. We have a press release that got dropped on amendment number 5 at clause-by-clause, and it doesn't address the culture.

The media did catch on, though, because on August 29, after the letter, after the defending of this, the spaghetti dinners and what have you, in the *Globe and Mail* it says, "Ontario Pulls Sudden About-Face with Vow to Ban Cash-For-Access Fundraisers." We have the promise that something is going to happen, but we don't have the information. So much for openness; so much for transparent; so much for leading from the activist centre.

Then we have this promise that, "Change is coming. Just trust us." The problem is that there is no trust, because we have a record of a government that has consistently put itself first, instead of the people of this province.

Currently, you now have, apparently, \$20 million in the bank, and now there's not going to be any fundraising that we are allowed to be part of, even though in some of that fundraising, when it's community-based and local, community people actually have an opportunity to say, "You know what? I really believe in the work you're doing. I think you're a good politician. I think you're a good public servant. I'd love to spend \$25 and come to the corn roast or the spaghetti dinner"—that's what's really interesting. Even the backbenchers don't even know what this means, because it would be unconscionable for that side of the House to actually have the amendments, and we don't have them.

It's a good thing that the media has caught on. The media has said, "What's missing is a move to restore the Ontario Auditor General's power to veto any government ad...."

"Again, rank self-interest looms as the inescapable motive for watering down the auditor's oversight."

That's an editorial from the *Toronto Star*, August 23. They totally see it for what it is.

This is from a Globe and Mail editorial: "But preventing a cabinet minister or opposition critic from personally accepting a cheque tonight doesn't prevent her from meeting privately with a generous donor tomorrow...."

"If Ms. Wynne is determined to end the perception that Ontario politicians are selling access, banning politicians from showing their faces at fundraisers won't do the trick." That's why you need conflict of interest legislation.

This is continuing from the Globe and Mail: "It will probably take a crew of 10 people working for a solid week to remove the skid marks at Queen's Park caused by the Wynne government's sudden U-turn on the issue of cash-for-access political fundraisers...."

"The cash-for-access scheme was a clear conflict of interest, to the point that at least one former Liberal cabinet minister said he left politics because of it...."

"It's a move that looks less like the zeal of a convert, and more like a petulant act of spite...."

"The scandal that forced the Liberals to introduce Bill 201 was not about a local MPP attending a potluck dinner in their riding, where tickets cost \$50. The scandal was the Liberals using their advantage as the governing party to collect large cheques from people seeking favour with cabinet members. It was cabinet members trading access for cash, or giving the appearance of doing so."

It goes on to say—this is an editorial of the Globe and Mail, September 1: "Do the Liberals now expect anyone to believe that, just because a cabinet minister can't attend a fundraiser, he or she won't be beholden to major donors?"

I would say no. The people of this province know what is going on, and they have the evidence to show it. It's very unfortunate that this is a missed opportunity that the Premier and the Liberal government of Ontario have really just thrown away, when we had the opportunity to make Bill 2 a comprehensive bill which would truly restore some confidence in our democratic process and our democratic institutions.

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We are going to continue, as this drama unfolds—because who knows what's coming? We don't know. We don't know what's in store for us. We don't know what's in store for our constituency associations. But we do know that the Liberals have \$20 million in the bank, and we do know how they got it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: First of all, let me say thank you to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for allowing me a couple of minutes to comment on her discussion.

I just want to put something straight here. We had public consultation after first reading. That doesn't happen very often. I must say I didn't attend all of them—I'm part of the committee—but I attended probably 80% of them. Frankly, we had to pull teeth to make sure that we had enough people to speak to us. In some places—Kitchener, London, Windsor—there might have

been three deputants. I remember in one place, somebody called in from Toronto.

Nevertheless, the people who came gave us some good advice. They talked about levelling the playing field and cash-for-access. So I will say to you that the \$5,000 to meet with the leader of the official opposition—it's not cash-for-access? The \$300—I'm not sure if it's a spaghetti dinner that the member is going to have in a couple of a weeks. So it's okay to tell the government members, "You can't do that, but it's okay for us to do it"?

Speaker, they're talking about levelling the playing field. All parties do fundraising. I do have \$20 spaghetti dinners, by the way, twice a year—and sometimes lasagna, if you're lucky. So all I'm saying to you—

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You can heckle all you want, but just look in the mirror—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize for having to interrupt.

I'm going to have to ask the member for Essex to refrain from heckling. I can't hear. Believe it or not, I can't hear the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, even though he's very close to me. He's got the floor.

I'll let you finish up.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, thank you so much.

I will say that when we go back to second reading consultation, which we're going to do, we'll have an opportunity to do some more input.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the leadoff speech from the NDP member from Kitchener–Waterloo, on Bill 2, the election finances act. I thought she made some very good points, in particular talking about the Auditor General and how the auditor's job has been weakened with regard to government advertising.

She specifically talked about the David Suzuki ad that's out there. The auditor was public about criticizing the government, saying that if that ad had been under the old rules, she would have deemed it to be partisan. But basically, the rules have been weakened so that she can no longer comment on it. She also pointed out the ORPP ads—some \$70 million being spent—that I'm sure would also be deemed to be partisan. The government does have a real advantage in that they can spend money on essentially partisan advertising that the other parties can't.

Mr. Speaker, I think the new aspect of this bill that the government has brought forward, trying to ban MPPs from any fundraising, frankly, is ridiculous. To compare the cabinet ministers going out and having a goal of \$500,000 to raise, versus individual opposition MPPs running a fundraiser once a year—which is in no way selling access; it's just raising money for a riding association. I see absolutely nothing wrong with MPPs doing a fundraiser to be able to fund an election every four years. I think that's part of this bill where I guess the

government is just trying to be vindictive or something, or trying to make it seem like the activities of opposition MPPs are somehow similar to selling access, like the cabinet ministers have been doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm really happy to join the debate and to comment on my colleague the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, who did a really great job in explaining what has happened through the committee process and what the nature of the bill before us today is.

A couple of points she really hit on very clearly: the almost unconscionable—not almost; it is unconscionable—actions of a member of the government, whether they be a cabinet minister especially, because they have a lot of responsibility, or a backbench member—the unconscionable behaviour in terms of supporting a bill that has yet to have the amendments to the bill presented to the House for us to debate. It is your primary job in this House to deliver complete information, not only to elected members but to the public at large, especially on something as important as electoral finance, which will play a role in deciding future governments. You're abdicating your responsibility to do that, and I hope members of the community and the electorate judge you accordingly, because you are really diluting the future process by not giving the complete picture.

Secondly, the criticism has been levied on this bill and on the previous actions of the government by the Integrity Commissioner and the Auditor General in respect to campaign financing and also advertising, things that have happened in the past that should never have happened. We look to other jurisdictions to see legislative road maps. Let's look to Alberta, where that government, under Rachel Notley, an NDP government—their first order of business was to bring in electoral finance reform to ban corporate and union donations. They didn't have to wait until they got caught—not that I think they ever would, because they have high moral standing in that government. But they didn't wait; they did it immediately because it was the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's my honour to join the debate on the elections financing act. I think so much of what we focus on in this House is about doing the right thing for the people in our respective communities. This bill is really about making sure that we are doing things in the right way so that the people who are here are motivated as much as possible by doing things for the people in their communities. That's why I respect a number of the changes that have been made in this bill.

First of all, I think that bringing forward a bill that bans corporate and union donations is excellent. I'm a little surprised to hear members of the NDP caucus talking about how somehow this is being done because we got caught. I don't remember them calling for a ban on union and corporate donations.

Over the summer months, we heard from the opposition parties, from experts and from the general public on

how the bill could be improved. A number of my colleagues worked incredibly hard, as did members on the opposition benches, to travel the province and hear from people. They invested a great portion of their summer, when they could have been back in their ridings with their constituents, in working on this bill. I think we should honour that as we talk about this bill, and support the bill as a result.

A number of amendments that are important as part of this bill: We'll rein in contribution limits even further. I think that just makes a lot of sense. That's just a great political lever that further democratizes how government operates—or how people fundraise, I should say. Creating a clear definition of what third-party advertising actually means—I think that makes a lot of sense also. And strengthening limits for government advertising before an election—I think that also makes a lot of sense, to make sure that the government of the day is focusing on issues that touch the people of Ontario and not focusing on any kind of partisan communication.

Like I said, Speaker, we're here to make a difference for the people in our communities, and a big part of that is making sure that we run government the right way. This bill will help ensure that we run government the right way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the questions and comments. We return to the member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the members from Northumberland-Quinte West, Essex, Parry Sound-Muskoka and Etobicoke Centre.

It's interesting, because the member from Northumberland-Quinte West said that few people came out. Well, when you consult on a bill in the heat of the summer, you're not going to get a lot of people.

The member from Etobicoke Centre said that we have to honour the voices and the people we heard from. Well, that's what we tried to do through our amendments. We tried to ban cash-for-access by tightening conflict of interest; the government shot it down. We tried to ban partisan government advertising; the government shot it down. We tried to protect free speech while cracking down on third-party and super-PAC-style—the government shot it down. New rules for lobbyists: They did not honour the people.

I'll conclude by saying that if I sound disappointed it's because I genuinely am. We did start this process with the best of intentions, but it's very clear that people have caught on to this government and it's a level of cynicism that I have not seen in a long time.

Here's a final quote from the *Globe and Mail*: "The Wynne Liberals acted arrogantly in first insisting there was nothing unseemly about their shakedowns. Now, they're trying to equate them with backyard barbecues of a low-ranking backbencher. With the Liberals, it seems one sophism just begets another." That's from Konrad Yakabuski from the *Globe and Mail*.

Our frustration is obviously because we have been sidelined as opposition members. We don't even have the full bill in front of us in this House.

This is from the Toronto Sun, September 1: "As they have from the beginning of this controversy, the Liberals are acting unilaterally, using their majority government to shove meaningful participation by the opposition parties aside.

"And they appear to be developing these plans on the fly, on the back of a napkin.

"To say skepticism of the Liberals' new-found reformist zeal is warranted would be an understatement."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West	
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Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
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